



**ROTORUA
LAKES COUNCIL**
Te Kaunihera o ngā Roto o Rotorua

Kaupapataka Late Items

NOTICE OF A MEETING OF COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday 19 August 2026

Time: 9:30 am

Venue: Council Chamber

MEMBERSHIP

Chair

Mayor Tapsell

Members

Deputy Mayor Kai Fong (Deputy Chair)

Cr Barker

Cr Brown

Cr Lee

Cr Wang

Cr Maxwell

Cr Paterson

Cr Raukawa-Tait

Cr Sandford

Cr Temara-Benfell

Quorum

6

**Andrew Moraes
Chief Executive**

Order of Business

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10 PŪRONGO KAIMAHI – STAFF REPORTS**10.5 HEAD START PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

Prepared by: Tania Tapsell, Mayor

Approved by: Tania Tapsell, Mayor

Attachments: Nil

**1. TE PŪTAKE
PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Chairperson's Report is to enable Council to consider the next step for Rotorua Lakes Council's Head Start position following the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 7 August 2026.

Council is asked to decide whether to direct the Chief Executive to progress an eligible joint proposal with Tauranga City Council, submit Rotorua's Central Bay of Plenty proposal notwithstanding eligibility risk, or submit the work completed to date to inform any future Government-led or collaborative reform process.

**2. TE TUHINGA WHAKARĀPOPOTOTANGA
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Council has previously supported a Bay of Plenty-wide Head Start approach based on three unitary authorities: Western Bay of Plenty, Eastern Bay of Plenty and Central Bay of Plenty, with the Central Bay of Plenty portion based on Rotorua Lakes Council boundaries. These three sub-regions have been strongly endorsed by both community and iwi engagement undertaken both in Rotorua and across the region by other Councils under the short timeframe.

Since those decisions, the Eastern Bay councils have submitted their proposal, Tauranga City Council has submitted a proposal, and Western Bay of Plenty District Council has resolved not to participate in that proposal. Rotorua Lakes Council did not conclude the process and instead submitted a draft proposal and requested an extension of time be approved by the Minister of Local Government for Council to confirm final approval, or not.

That changed position means Rotorua has a further decision to make. A Rotorua-only proposal advances Council's preferred Central Bay of Plenty position but carries eligibility risk because current Government guidance requires Head Start proposals to be submitted by two or more participating territorial authorities. A joint proposal with Tauranga City Council is more likely to meet the eligibility criteria, but would require Council to accept the inclusion of Western Bay of Plenty District in a Western unitary authority despite that council's decision not to participate.

Three practical options are available: develop a joint eligible proposal with Tauranga City Council; submit Rotorua's Central Bay of Plenty proposal noting its likely non-eligibility if assessed alone; or submit the work completed to date as information to support future detailed design, including any backstop process. Each option carries governance, legal, political, iwi/Māori, community and reputational risks.

**HE TŪTOHUNGA
RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the report 'Head Start Proposal Submission' be received.

OPTION 1: Develop a joint eligible proposal for Rotorua Central Unitary with Tauranga Council

That Council direct the Chief Executive to work with the Tauranga City Council to submit an eligible Head Start proposal that includes:

A Western Unitary Authority, comprising of the current borders of the Western Bay of Plenty District and Tauranga City, as approved by Tauranga City Council and,

A Central (Rotorua) Unitary Authority comprising of the Rotorua district as described in the proposal presented to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 7 August 2026.

OR

OPTION 2: Submit a Central (Rotorua) Unitary proposal only

Council authorises the Chief Executive to finalise and submit the Head Start proposal seeking support for Rotorua to be a stand-alone Unitary Authority, presented to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 7 August 2026, noting it's non-eligibility according to the criteria and our objection to force unwilling Councils into this process.

OR

OPTION 3: Submit the work completed to date for information

Accept Rotorua progressing in to Backstop option, and submit for information only the work done to date to inform this Government-led approach.

**3. TE TĀHUHU
BACKGROUND**

On 5 May 2026, the Government announced the Head Start pathway as a voluntary and streamlined process for councils willing to reorganise into new unitary authorities before the wider local government reform process proposed from 2028.

Council considered Head Start matters on 8 June, 24 June and 29 July 2026. On 29 July 2026, Council supported a Bay of Plenty-wide approach involving three distinct unitary authorities: Western Bay of Plenty, Eastern Bay of Plenty and Central Bay of Plenty. Council also resolved that Rotorua should not be included in any alternative Head Start configuration without Rotorua Lakes Council approval.

At the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 7 August 2026, Council considered a Head Start proposal based on the Central Bay of Plenty Unitary Authority. The proposal was prepared as part of a wider Bay of Plenty three-unitary model and was not intended to be assessed as a stand-alone Rotorua-only proposal. No decision was made on 7 August 2026, however based on a brief extension granted by the Minister of Local Government this report is seeking final direction from Council on the way forward.

Following the decisions of other councils, the earlier assumption of a single coordinated Bay of Plenty proposal has changed. The Eastern Bay councils have advanced their proposal to meet eligibility criteria and deadline. Tauranga City Council has strong support for a Western Bay proposal, but submitted an ineligible proposal as Western Bay of Plenty District Council narrowly resolved not to participate. Current Government guidance indicates that Head Start proposals must be submitted by at least two participating territorial authorities, creating an eligibility issue for any Rotorua-only submission.

4. TE MATAPAKI ME NGĀ KŌWHIRINGA DISCUSSION AND OPTIONS

Option 1: Develop a joint eligible proposal for a Central (Rotorua) Unitary with Tauranga City Council.

This is the only option remaining for Rotorua to submit an eligible Headstart proposal and directs the Chief Executive to work with Tauranga City Council to develop and submit a proposal containing a Western Unitary Authority and a Central Bay of Plenty Unitary Authority, noting a Eastern Unitary has already been submitted. This is the option most likely to address the eligibility issue because it would involve more than one participating council and reduce the total number of councils in the Bay of Plenty region from seven to three. The principal concern is that it would include Western Bay of Plenty District Council in the proposed Western authority despite that council's unwillingness to participate.

Option 2: Submit a Central (Rotorua) Unitary proposal only.

Approve the proposal presented to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 7 August 2026 and authorise submission to Government, while expressly noting we endorse Rotorua as a standalone Unitary, and that we do not wish to force unwilling Councils into Headstart pathway. This option would not meet the Head Start eligibility criteria and would also result in Tauranga being ineligible, but signals Rotorua Council's intention and value of only collaborating with willing Councils.

Option 3: Submit the work completed to date for information.

This option would approve the Central Bay of Plenty proposal in principle as Council's preferred blueprint for a future three-unitary Bay of Plenty model, without presenting it as an eligible Head Start submission. The work would be provided to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport to inform any future detailed design, collaborative process or backstop reform process. This option preserves Council's policy position but will not be included in Cabinet's Head Start decisions and would rely on a later Government decision to confirm Rotorua Council merging into a future Unitary Authority.

5. TE TINO AROMATAWAI ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The matters in this report are part of a process that may lead to a significant decision under Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. Any final reorganisation of local government would have

substantial governance, representation, financial, service delivery, Treaty settlement, iwi/Māori relationship and community impacts.

The decision sought in this report is an urgent direction on whether and how to submit or provide information to Government. It does not itself make a final reorganisation decision. If any proposal progresses beyond outline stage, further detailed design, financial analysis, iwi/Māori engagement, community consultation and Council decisions will be required.

6. NGĀ KŌRERA O TE HAPORI ME TE WHAKATAIRANGA COMMUNITY INPUT/ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

The timeframe has not enabled the level of formal consultation that would ordinarily be expected before a final local government reorganisation decision.

Council has undertaken two phases of engagement on Head Start within a compressed timeframe. Earlier engagement identified strong interest in keeping Rotorua's own voice, managing costs and delivering financial benefits, protecting the environment, considering the Kaituna Catchment and Mai Maketū ki Tongariro context, involving iwi/Māori and on-going support for existing Treaty Settlements and relationships..

We acknowledge the valuable and significant contribution by Te Arawa Iwi Chairs who have assisted in engagement and co-design of a Rotorua proposal for Headstart Pathway with support from Te Tatau o Te Arawa.

Mayors of the six Territorial Authorities, the Chairperson of Regional Council, and Chief Executives have also collaborated through the BOP Mayoral Forum to assist in delivering the best outcomes for the region.

7. HE WHAIWHAKAARO CONSIDERATIONS

7.1. Mahere Pūtea Financial/Budget Considerations

There are no immediate budget approvals sought through this report. Any submission or provision of information can be completed within existing staff resources, although the work has required and may continue to require reprioritisation of staff time.

If any proposal is accepted into detailed design, unbudgeted resourcing may be required for financial analysis, legal advice, iwi/Māori engagement, communications, transition planning and specialist technical work. Any material unbudgeted expenditure should be brought back to Council for approval.

7.2. Kaupapa Here Me Ngā Hiraunga Whakariterite Policy and Planning Implications

The options are connected to Council's previous Head Start decisions and its strategic interest in protecting Rotorua's local voice, Te Arawa and iwi/Māori relationships, catchment interests, financial position and ability to influence future local government reform.

The report does not propose amendment to the Long-term Plan or Annual Plan. If any proposal proceeds to detailed design or implementation, future decisions may have implications for Council's planning documents, service delivery arrangements, regional function delivery and representation arrangements.

7.3. Te Aromatawai Whakapātanga Ki Te Tāngata Whenua Tāngata Whenua Impact Assessment

Tāngata whenua interests are central to any future reorganisation proposal for Rotorua. Rotorua's Treaty settlement context, Te Arawa partnership arrangements, iwi and hapū relationships, lake and catchment governance arrangements are all material considerations.

The options in this report do not resolve those matters. If any proposal progresses beyond outline or information stage, further engagement with iwi, hapū, PSGEs and Te Arawa partners will be required before final decisions are made. The proposal should continue to state clearly that existing Treaty settlement arrangements, statutory boards, co-governance arrangements and relationship agreements must be protected through any transition.

7.4. Tūraru Risks

The main risks are:

- Eligibility risk: a Rotorua-only proposal may not meet the current Head Start criteria if assessed in isolation.
- Legal and governance risk: progressing a proposal affecting Western Bay of Plenty District Council without its willing participation could be contentious and may be challenged politically or procedurally.
- Relationship risk: Rotorua and Tauranga City Council submitting a proposal together is the only option remaining to meet eligibility criteria, by not supporting this then Tauranga City is essentially forced to continue as an ineligible proposal.
- Community trust risk: the compressed timeframe limits the ability to fully test community views before a submission is made.
- Iwi/Māori relationship risk: Te Arawa Iwi Chairs through their engagement have mandated endorsement to support Rotorua submitting a Headstart proposal, a decision against this may damage future trust and collaboration opportunities. Any perception that iwi, hapū or PSGE interests are not central to the next stage could damage relationships and weaken the proposal.
- Strategic risk: taking no active step may mean Rotorua has less influence over any future Government-led backstop process.
- Reputational risk: Council's position must be clear, consistent and transparent given changing circumstances and decisions by other councils.

These risks can be mitigated by clearly recording Council's chosen option, stating any eligibility assumptions, preserving the need for further engagement and Council decisions, and ensuring any submission accurately reflects the limits of the decision being made.

**7.5. Te Whaimana
Authority**

Council has authority to determine whether to approve, submit or provide information to Government on its Head Start position. The Mayor may bring this report as Chairperson's Report under Standing Order 9.6.