



**Ruapehu District Council  
Te Kaunihera-ā-Rohe o Ruapehu**

**Code of Conduct  
Te Tikanga Whanonga**

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# Contents

Introduction   Kupu whakataki.....	3
Review and amendment   Te arotake me te whakahou .....	3
Code of Conduct   Anga Tikanga Whanonga.....	4
Members' commitment   Ngā herenga a ngā mema .....	4
1 Definitions   Ngā whakamārama .....	5
2 Te Tiriti o Waitangi.....	5
3 Principles of good governance   Ngā mātāpono o te mana urungi pai .....	5
4 Behaviours   Ngā whanonga.....	6
4.1 Respect   Te whakaute .....	6
4.2 Bullying, harassment, and discrimination   Te whakaweti, te whakatīwheta me te whakatoihara .....	6
4.3 Sharing information   Te tuari mōhiohio.....	7
4.4 Expressing personal views publicly   Te whakaatu i ngā whakaaro whaiaro ki te marea ....	7
4.5 Provide equitable contribution   Me tautika ngā mahi .....	8
4.6 Disrepute   Te māteatea .....	8
4.7 Use of position for personal advantage   Te whiwhi huanga whaiaro i tō tūranga .....	8
4.8 Impartiality   Te tōkeke.....	8
4.9 Maintaining confidentiality   Te ū ki te matatapu .....	9
5 Breaches of the Code of Conduct.....	9
5.1 Principles   Ngā mātāpono .....	9
5.2 Who can make a complaint?   Ka taea e wai te tuku amuamu?.....	9
5.3 Complaint referred to Mayor or a Chairperson  .....	10
5.5 Mediation  .....	10
5.6 Complaint referred to the Code of Conduct Panel.....	10
5.6.1 Role of the Code of Conduct Panel .....	10
5.7 Costs and support   Te utu me te tautoko.....	11
6 Actions that may be applied when a breach has been confirmed   Ngā mahi ka whāia pea ina whakatauhia tētahi takahanga .....	12
6.1 Responses to statutory breaches   Ngā whakautu ki ngā takahanga ture.....	12

## Introduction | Kupu whakataki

The Code of Conduct is designed to ensure that the governance of our local authorities is undertaken with the highest degree of integrity while also providing a safe and rewarding environment in which all elected members can thrive.

All kaunihera have a statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002), to adopt a code of conduct. They complement specific statutes, such as the Local Government and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA), designed to ensure openness and transparency. Codes of conduct are an important part of building community confidence in our system and processes, and contribute to:

- good governance of the city, district, or region,
- effective decision-making and community engagement,
- the credibility and accountability of the local authority to its communities, and
- a culture of mutual trust and respect between members of the local authority and with management.

Codes of conduct should promote effective working relationships within a local authority and between the authority and its community. It should promote free and frank debate which should in turn result in good decision making.

Codes of conduct are not a means of preventing members from expressing their personal views provided they are clearly signaled as personal views. Rather the code is designed to promote robust debate and the expression of all views by providing a framework to ensure that debate is conducted in a civil and respectful way.

A code of conduct sets boundaries on standards of behaviour and provides a means of resolving situations when elected members breach those standards.

## Review and amendment | Te arotake me te whakahou

Once adopted, the code continues in force until amended by the kaunihera. It can be amended at any time but cannot be revoked unless the kaunihera replaces it with another code.

Amendments require a resolution supported by 75 per cent of the kaunihera members present at the kaunihera meeting at which the amendment is considered.

Kaunihera are encouraged to formally review their existing code and either amend or re-adopt it as soon as practicable after the beginning of each triennium, to ensure that the code is fully endorsed by all members.

## Code of Conduct | Anga Tikanga Whanonga

The Ruapehu District Council Code of Conduct has been adopted in accordance with the requirements of the Clause 15, Schedule 7 of the LGA 2002, which requires every local authority to adopt a code of conduct for members of the local authority.

### Members' commitment | Ngā herenga a ngā mema

These commitments apply when conducting the business of the local authority as its representative or the representative of an electorate, and communicating with other members, the media, the public, or staff. By adopting the Code of Conduct members agree that they will:

1. treat all people fairly,
2. treat all other members, staff, and members of the public, with respect,
3. share with the local authority any information received that is pertinent to the ability of the local authority to properly perform its statutory duties,
4. operate in a manner that recognises and respects the significance of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi,
5. make it clear, when speaking publicly, that statements reflect their personal view, unless otherwise authorised to speak on behalf of the local authority,
6. take all reasonable steps to equitably undertake the duties, responsibilities, and workload expected of a member,
7. not bully, harass, or discriminate unlawfully against any person,
8. not bring the local authority into disrepute,
9. not use their position to improperly advantage themselves or anyone else or disadvantage another person,
10. not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority,
11. not disclose information acquired, or given, in confidence, which they believe is of a confidential nature.

**Please note:** a failure to act in accordance with these commitments may result in a complaint being taken against you.

The Code of Conduct sets standards for the behaviour of members towards other members, staff, the public, and the media. It is also concerned with the disclosure of information that members receive in their capacity as members. Members of a local authority must comply with the Code of Conduct of that local authority. More detail explaining the Code of Conduct is set out below.

[Clause 15 of Schedule 7](#) of the LGA, sets out the requirements for a code of conduct.

## 1 Definitions | Ngā whakamārama

For the purposes of this Code “member” means an elected or appointed member of:

- the governing body of the local authority,
- any committee or sub-committee of the local authority,
- any local board of the local authority, or
- any community board of the local authority.

Local authority means the kaunihera, local board or community board which has adopted this Code.

## 2 Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The Ruapehu District Council commits to operating in a manner that recognises and respects the significance of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledges the following principles:

1. Tino Rangatiratanga: The principle of self-determination provides for Māori self-determination and mana motuhake. This requires local authorities to be open to working with mana whenua partners in the design and delivery of their work programmes,
2. Partnership: The principle of partnership implies that local authorities will seek to establish a strong and enduring relationship with iwi and Māori, within the context of iwi and Māori expectations. Kaunihera should identify opportunities, and develop and maintain ways, for Māori to contribute to kaunihera decisions, and consider ways kaunihera can help build Māori capacity to contribute to council decision-making,
3. Equity: The principle of equity requires local authorities to commit to achieving the equitable delivery of local public services,
4. Active protection: The principle of active protection requires local authorities to be well informed on the wellbeing of iwi, hapū and whanau within their respective rohe,
5. Options: The principle of options requires local authorities to ensure that its services are provided in a culturally appropriate way that recognises and supports the expression of te ao Māori.

## 3 Principles of good governance | Ngā mātāpono o te mana urungi pai

Members recognise the importance of the following principles of good governance.

- **Public interest:** members should act solely in the public interest.
- **Integrity:** members should not act or take decisions to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends, or place themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might inappropriately influence them in their work.
- **Tāria te wā and kaitiakitanga/stewardship:** members should use long-term perspective when making decisions. Decisions, which impact on past, current and future generations, also affect collective well-being.
- **Objectivity:** members should act and take decisions impartially, fairly, and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability:** members will be accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and will submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness:** members should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner and not withhold information from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty:** members should be truthful and not misleading.
- **Leadership:** members should not only exhibit these principles in their own behaviour but also be willing to challenge poor behaviour in others, wherever it occurs.

## 4 Behaviours | Ngā whanonga

To promote good governance and build trust between the local authority, its members, and citizens, members **agree** to the following standards of conduct when they are:

- conducting the business of the local authority,
- acting as a representative of the local authority,
- acting as a representative of their electorate,
- communicating with other members, the media, the public and staff, and
- using social media and other communication channels.<sup>1</sup>

Where a member's conduct falls short of these standards, members accept that they may be subject to a complaint made under the council's "Policy for alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct".

### 4.1 *Respect | Te whakaute*

Members will treat all other members, staff, and members of the public, with respect.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and writing. Debate and differences are all part of a healthy democracy. As a member of a local authority you can challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You must not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations of, and confidence in, your local authority. In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening, you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police.

### 4.2 *Bullying, harassment, and discrimination | Te whakaweti, te whakatīwheta me te whakatoihara*

Members will treat all people fairly and will not:

- bully any person,
- harass any person, or
- discriminate unlawfully against any person.

For the purpose of the Code of Conduct, bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour. It represents an abuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate, or injure another person. It may be:

- a regular pattern of behaviour, or a one-off incident,
- occur face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace, or at work social events, and
- may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

Harassment means conduct that causes alarm or distress, or puts people in fear of violence, and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the Guidelines for the responsible use of social media in the LGNZ Good Governance Guide  
The Local Government Code of Conduct : Ruapehu District Council // 6

Unlawful discrimination occurs when a person is treated unfairly, or less favourably, than another person because of any of the following<sup>2</sup>:

age	skin, hair, or eye colour	race
disability	employment status	ethical belief
ethnic or national origin	family status	marital status
political opinion	religious belief	gender identity
sex	sexual orientation.	

### **4.3 Sharing information | Te tuari mōhiohio**

Members will share with the local authority any information received that is pertinent to the ability of the local authority to properly perform its statutory duties.

Occasionally members will receive information in their capacity as members of the governing body, which is pertinent to the ability of their kaunihera to properly perform its statutory duties. Where this occurs members will disclose any such information to other members and, where appropriate, the chief executive. Members who are offered information on the condition that it remains confidential will inform the person making the offer that they are under a duty to disclosure such information, for example, to a governing body meeting in public exclusion.

### **4.4 Expressing personal views publicly | Te whakaatu i ngā whakaaro whaiaro ki te marea**

Members, except when authorised to speak on behalf of the local authority, will make it clear, when speaking to the media, on social media, or in hui and presentations, that statements reflect their personal view.

The media play an important role in the operation and efficacy of our local democracy and need accurate and timely information about the affairs of the local authority to fulfil that role. Members are free to express a personal view to the media and in other public channels at any time, provided the following rules are observed:

- they do not purport to talk on behalf of the local authority, if permission to speak on behalf of the authority has not been given to them
- their comments must not be inconsistent with the Code, for example, they should not disclose confidential information or criticise individual members of staff, and
- their comments must not purposefully misrepresent the views of the local authority or other members.

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<sup>2</sup> See Human Rights Commission <https://www.govt.nz/browse/law-crime-and-justice/human-rights-in-nz/human-rights-and-freedoms/>

#### **4.5 Provide equitable contribution | *Me tautika ngā mahi***

Members will take all reasonable steps to equitably undertake the duties, responsibilities, and workload expected of them.

Being a member is a position of considerable trust, given to you by your community to act on their behalf. To fulfil the expectations of your constituents and contribute to the good governance of your area it is important that you make all reasonable efforts to attend meetings and workshops, prepare for meetings, attend civic events, and participate in relevant training seminars.

The local government workload can be substantial, and it is important that every member contributes appropriately. This requires members to often work as a team and avoid situations where the majority of the work falls on the shoulders of a small number of members.

#### **4.6 Disrepute | *Te māteatea***

Members will not bring the local authority into disrepute.

Members are trusted to make decisions on behalf of their communities and as such their actions and behaviours are subject to greater scrutiny than other citizens. Members' actions also reflect on the local authority as well as themselves and can serve to either boost or erode public confidence in both.

Behaviours that might bring a local authority into disrepute, and diminish its ability to fulfil its statutory role, include behaviours that are dishonest and/or deceitful. Adhering to this Code does not in any way limit a member's ability to hold the local authority and fellow members to account or constructively challenge and express concerns about decisions and processes undertaken by their local authority.

#### **4.7 Use of position for personal advantage | *Te whiwhi huanga whaiaro i tō tūranga***

Members will not use, or attempt to use, their position to improperly advantage themselves or anyone else, or disadvantage another person.

Being a member of a local authority comes with certain opportunities and privileges, including the power to make choices that can impact on others. Members must not take advantage of such opportunities to further their own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly. A member found to have personally benefited by information gained as an elected member may be subject to the provisions of the Secret Commissions Act 2010.

#### **4.8 Impartiality | *Te tōkeke***

Members will not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority.

Officers work for the local authority as a whole and must be politically neutral (unless they are political assistants). They must not be coerced or persuaded to act in a way that would undermine their neutrality. Members can question officers to gain understanding of their thinking and decision-making, however, they must not seek to influence officials to change their advice or alter the content of a report, other than in a meeting or workshop, if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity. Members should:

- make themselves aware of the obligations that the local authority and chief executive have as employers and always observe these requirements, such as the obligation to be a good employer, and
- observe any protocols put in place by the chief executive concerning contact between members and employees, and not publicly criticise individual staff.



If you have concerns about the behaviour of an official, whether permanent or contracted, you should raise your concerns with the local authority's chief executive, or, if the concerns are to do with the chief executive, raise them with the mayor, the council chairperson, or chief executive performance committee.

#### **4.9 Maintaining confidentiality | Te ū ki te matatapu**

Members will not disclose information acquired, or given, in confidence, which they believe is of a confidential nature, unless.

1. they have the consent of a person authorised to give it,
2. they are required by law to do so,
3. the disclosure is to a third party to obtain professional legal advice, and that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person, or
4. the disclosure is reasonable and in the public interest, is made in good faith, and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority.

### **5 Breaches of the Code of Conduct**

Members must comply with the provisions of the code (LGA 2002, schedule 7, cl. 15(4)). Any member, or the Chief Executive, who believes that the Code has been breached by the behaviour of a member may make a complaint to that effect. All complaints will be considered in a manner that is consistent with the following principles.

#### **5.1 Principles | Ngā mātāpono**

The following principles will guide the investigation into, and assessment of, complaints made against a member for breaching the Code of Conduct:

- The complaints process will be independent, impartial, and respect members' privacy.
- Members will be given due notice that an investigation is underway and will be provided with an opportunity to be heard.
- Members will have a right to seek independent advice, be represented, and, if they choose, be accompanied by a support person throughout the process.
- Complaints will be resolved at the lowest level of resolution as possible, with priority given to finding a mediated settlement.
- Complainants, and members subject to a complaint, will have access to advice and support for the time it takes to find a resolution<sup>3</sup>.

#### **5.2 Who can make a complaint? | Ka taea e wai te tuku amuamu?**

The Code of Conduct is designed to be a self-regulatory instrument and complaints regarding a breach of the Code can only be made by members themselves, or the Chief Executive, who can make a complaint on behalf of their staff.

All complaints made under this Code of Conduct must be made in writing and forwarded to the Chief Executive. On receipt of a complaint, the Chief Executive must forward the complaint to the Mayor/Chairperson or, where the Mayor/Chairperson is a party to the complaint, the appointed Code of Conduct Panel.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, by enabling both parties to access a council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or elected members' equivalent.

### **5.3 Complaint referred to Mayor or a Chairperson | Tukuna ki te ūpoko, te koromatua rānei**

On receipt of a complaint made under the provisions of the Council's Code of Conduct the Mayor/Chair will, as the situation allows:

- Interview the complainant to assess the full extent of the complaint.
- Interview the member(s) subject to the complaint.
- Assess the complaint to determine materiality.

Where a complaint is assessed by the Mayor/Chair to be trivial, frivolous or minor, a meeting or meetings with the Chairperson will be regarded as sufficient to resolve the complaint. Actions for the Chairperson's consideration include:

- That the complaint is dismissed
- That the member tenders an apology
- That the member attends a relevant training course
- That the member work with a mentor for a period, or
- That the relevant parties are assisted to find a mutually agreeable solution.

### **5.5 Mediation | Te takawaenga**

If the complaint concerns a dispute between two members, or between a member and another party, mediation may be recommended. If mediation is agreed by both parties, then its completion will represent the end of the complaints process. The outcomes of any mediation will be confidential and, other than reporting that a complaint has been resolved through mediation, there will be no additional report to the local authority unless the complaint is referred to an independent investigator, usually due to a failure of the mediation.

### **5.6 Complaint referred to the Code of Conduct Panel**

Where the Mayor/Chairperson finds that the complaint is serious or no resolution can be reached and/or mediation is refused, or where the Mayor/Chairperson is a party to the complaint, the Chief Executive will refer the complaint to the Code of Conduct Panel. The Code of Conduct Panel will be appointed at the beginning of each Triennium.

Complaints that are dismissed, referred to a chairperson, or resolved by mediation, will not be reported to the local authority.

#### **5.6.1 Role of the Code of Conduct Panel**

The Code of Conduct Panel will:

- determine whether a breach has occurred,
- if so, determine the seriousness of the breach, and
- determine actions that a local authority should take in response to the breach.

Any recommended actions made in response to a complaint that has been upheld are binding on the local authority. This is to ensure the process for investigation is free of any suggestion of bias and reduces the cost of the complaints process, by reducing the time spent on it, by members and officials.

## Determining the significance of an alleged breach

The Code of Conduct Panel may take whatever actions they need to determine the significance of a complaint, within the budgetary constraints set down, including re-assessing the complaint.

The Code of Conduct Panel will undertake an investigation appropriate to the scale of the breach, which may include interviews with other affected parties, and prepare a report for the Chief Executive which will set out the rationale for their findings and may include recommendations for resolving the breach and appropriate penalties.

When considering the issue of significance, the Code of Conduct Panel will need to consider a range of factors before deciding, such as:

- Was the breach intentional or unintentional?
- Did it occur once or is there a pattern of recurring behaviour?
- Does the breach have legal or financial ramifications for the kaunihera?
- What is the impact of the breach on other elected members, on kaimahi (officials) and on the community in general?

Code of Conduct Panel can make a binding rule

On completing their investigation, a Code of Conduct Panel may dismiss a complaint or make a binding ruling which the governing body will implement. The Code of Conduct Panel's ruling will be contained in a report to the kaunihera Chief Executive which will form the basis of a consequent report to the governing body to inform them of the decision and the actions that they may be required to take.

**Please note:** All actions taken in the implementation of a policy must be consistent with the Bill of Rights Act 1990. No appeal right is included in the Code of Conduct. Members who are unhappy with an Code of Conduct Panel's decision have access to judicial review and/or the Ombudsman's Office.

## 5.7 Costs and support | Te utu me te tautoko

Kaunihera must ensure that members who make a complaint are not left to meet any costs created by doing so. Members, those who make complaints, and those who are subject to a complaint, should be given appropriate and reasonable support.

The costs of assessment and investigatory services will be met by the relevant kaunihera.

## 6 Actions that may be applied when a breach has been confirmed | Ngā mahi ka whāia pea ina whakatauhia tētahi takahanga

Where a complaint that the Code of Conduct was breached has been upheld, any actions taken against the member found to be in breach should be consistent with the following principles.

- Actions should be commensurate with the seriousness of the breach.
- Actions should be applied in a manner that is culturally appropriate and safe for the members involved.
- Actions should, to the degree practical, contribute to an inclusive culture in the local authority by focusing on constructive mediation, learning, and member improvement.

In determining a response to a breach of the Code of Conduct, one or more of the following could be selected:

- 1 That no action is required.
- 2 That the member meets with the Mayor/Chairperson for advice.
- 3 That the member attends a relevant training course.
- 4 That the member agrees to cease the behaviour.
- 5 That the member work with a mentor for a period.
- 6 That the member tenders an apology.
- 7 That the member participates in voluntary mediation (if the complaint involves a conflict between two members).
- 8 That the local authority sends a letter of censure to the member.
- 9 That the local authority passes a vote of no confidence in the member.
- 10 That the member loses certain kaunihera-funded privileges (such as attendance at conferences).
- 11 That the member loses specific responsibilities, such as committee chair, deputy committee chair or portfolio holder.
- 12 That the member be subject to restricted entry to kaunihera offices, such as no access to staff areas (where restrictions may not previously have existed).
- 13 That the member be subject to limitations on their dealings with kaunihera staff, other than the chief executive or identified senior manager.
- 14 That the member be suspended from committees or other bodies to which the member has been appointed.
- 15 That the member be invited to consider resigning from the Council.

**Please note:** Actions 1-6 will typically not be reported to the local authority. Actions 7-15, which have a high degree of public interest, namely democratic representation, should be considered in an open meeting, unless there are grounds, such as those set out in LGOIMA, for not doing so.

### 6.1 Responses to statutory breaches | Ngā whakautu ki ngā takahanga ture

In cases where a breach of the Code of Conduct is found to involve regulatory or legislative requirements, the chief executive will refer the complaint to the relevant agency. For example:

- Breaches relating to members' interests (where members may be liable for prosecution by the Auditor-General under LAMIA).
- Breaches which result in the council suffering financial loss or damage (where the Auditor-General may make a report on the loss or damage under section 44 LGA 2002 which may result in the member having to make good the loss or damage).
- Breaches relating to the commission of a criminal offence which will be referred to the Police (which may leave the elected member liable for criminal prosecution).