

## Young people make their presence felt

Waiheke's young people made their presence known at the Waiheke Local Board inaugural meeting that was held at Ostend Memorial Hall on Monday afternoon.

Around 70 members of public attended the meeting that was held to swear in the incoming board and elect a chairperson and deputy chair.

Waiheke High School's kapa haka group, Piringākau, opened the event with a performance for the audience that included re-elected Mayor Phil Goff, newly elected councillor for the Waitematā and Gulf Islands ward Pippa Coom, George Kahi of Ngāti Paoa and Fullers360 chief executive Mike Horne.

At 5pm the meeting was opened by Rama Ormsby, Auckland Council's head of Māori relationships and governance, Te Waka Anga Mua Ki Uta.

Auckland Council CEO Stephen Town gave a welcome address, saying he particularly wanted to thank the board members' families for effectively giving them away. Mr Town acknowledged the previous board's work in garnering increased control of Waiheke issues from council organisations, saying the council had been trialling new ways of doing things and that there could be more improvements to be made.

The meeting then moved to swearing in the local board. With the process running alphabetically, re-elected board member Cath Handley was first to state her declaration. Ms Handley asked whānau and friends if they would like to join her and she read her declaration surrounded by 10 supporters. She then thanked her supporters acknowledged that it was emotionally tough for her to stand there, as three years ago her husband Pete had stood beside her and he had backed her to the hilt. Ms Handley had since lost her husband and other close family members and she thanked those who had helped her through the grief, saying they had been rock solid. Ms Handley made special mention of retired board member John Meeuwse, who she said went out of his way to support her in invisible ways.

Kylee Matthews was next to make her declaration with her partner and 12 supporters by her side. Ms Matthews said her declaration was her commitment to her culture and "to us as people". As soon as she had finished speaking members of Waiheke High School's Piringākau, who had been in the process of getting changed from their performance, erupted into a haka tautoko, a haka of support for Ms Matthews. The group's demonstration set



The seven people now in charge of running Waiheke politics: Bob Upchurch, Pippa Coom, Cath Handley, Paul Walden, Kylee Matthews, Phil Goff and Robin Tucker.

down a challenge that young people and their futures would now, more than ever, be on the local board agenda.

Ms Matthews responded, saying: "I will not let you down." Her supporters then performed an emotionally charged waiata.

Robin Tucker followed, reading her declaration with supporters at her side, adding her thanks to the people of Waiheke for their support throughout the election and saying she would do her best to represent Waiheke views to council.

**"It is important that everything we do is driven with the children in mind."**  
- Paul Walden

Next, Bob Upchurch took to the lectern with his wife Deb. As the now usual flurry of supporters rushing to a member's side failed to occur, Mr Upchurch's humour was evident when he quipped "my crew is still out there working".

Mr Upchurch thanked his wife for her support, adding that three years ago they were happily retired but these three years had been magnificent. Again, Mr Upchurch elicited laughter when he thanked the Waiheke community for its support "and all the advice". He said he was looking forward to supporting all the people who were doing wonderful things on the island.

The final board member to make his declaration was Paul Walden with 17 supporters at his side, including his parents. The theme of young people emerged again as Mr Walden said that the world over, his children's generation were rising up to face

huge challenges.

"It is important that everything we do is driven with the children in mind," he said.

Mr Walden pointed to Mayor Goff having been part of the government that introduced the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Act but that all indicators still showed that the health of the Gulf was deteriorating.

"Out here in the Gulf our concerns are valid, our island's natural environment is of national significance," he said, going on to acknowledge the retirement of Mike Lee and the contribution he had made to the region.

Mr Walden finished by acknowledging his wife and children, who weren't present, and recognising the ongoing support of his extended family throughout what he said had come to be known as 'Council's Dawn Raid' and the consequences that followed from that.

At 5.40pm, Auckland Council relationship manager Helgard Wagener announced that the Waiheke Local Board was in place and would now elect a chairperson.

Bob Upchurch nominated Cath Handley for chairperson and Robin Tucker seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations. Mr Upchurch, Ms Tucker and Ms Matthews voted for Ms Handley.

At 5.43pm Ms Handley was declared chairperson and then gave her address. She thanked her colleagues and gave her assurance that she would continue to encourage debate and for the board to commit to working together.

She indicated the pace the new board's work is likely to take, saying that Waiheke was on a steep trajectory to stark choices.

"We need to work as soon as possible to develop a strategy for Waiheke, Rakino and

## at inaugural board meeting



The kapa haka group Piringākau gave an impromptu haka of support at Ostend Memorial Hall as Kylee Matthews was sworn in to the Waiheke Local Board. Photos Erin Johnson

the Gulf," she said. Each local board area had one project in council's plan and for Waiheke it was Matiatia, but she said that while attention had focused on Matiatia, the rest of the island had been overlooked.

The Accommodation Providers Targeted Rate had taken the island backwards and the impacts of the regional fuel tax had been felt widely, she said. Waiheke's role in the wider economy needed to be considered along with the consequences of visitor numbers swelling towards three million a year. This could be done, she said, with leadership from Ngāti Paoa and by working with the mayor to create a comprehensive plan where the attraction of Waiheke was as much about our arts and way of life as the vineyards and beaches.

"We need a joined up, properly funded plan that ensures we are going to thrive, not in the long run but next year and the year after that," she said.

At 5.52pm Ms Handley took her seat at the table as chairperson.

The board moved on to the election of the deputy chair. Ms Tucker nominated Mr Upchurch and Mr Walden nominated Ms Matthews for deputy chair.

Ms Tucker, Mr Upchurch and Ms Handley voted for Mr Upchurch while Mr Walden and Ms Matthews voted for Ms Matthews, making Mr Upchurch deputy.

At that point, Mr Walden interjected into proceedings to explain that Ms Matthews had earlier in the day expressed a desire to take a leadership role on the board and he requested it be noted that the board would revisit the role of deputy chair halfway through the term.

"It's not a commitment on behalf of the board but it creates an opportunity for this

young lady," said Mr Walden. Mr Upchurch seconded the motion.

Mayor Phil Goff then delivered his address, saying that people had already taken the opportunity to talk with him about Waiheke matters before the meeting - notably the anger with Auckland Transport concerning the new bus routes.

Speaking to re-elected members, Mayor Goff said they had no excuse for not knowing what they were getting themselves into. "It is a job that will give you immense satisfaction when you can make a difference to your community. That is the upside of the job." He said public figures gave away some privacy and sacrificed family time, and it was critically important to have the support of their families.

Mayor Goff also spoke to the theme of youth and climate change, saying it will affect our children and our grandchildren.

"If we don't lead on this how will we advocate for change to head off the effects of climate change," he said.

The mayor hinted at a sign of things to come, saying: "Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die." He said every board in the region will tell him what they want and add 'but we don't want you to raise rates'.

"If you want to make this a world-class city there are only two places you get that money and that's from taxpayers and ratepayers," he said.

In response to Ms Handley's comment on the APTR, he said he would prefer a bed tax but that was a matter for central government.

Cr Coom then gave a brief, impromptu address, saying "you will be seeing a lot of me on Waiheke".

The final matter on the agenda was to confirm the board's first business meeting which will take place on Wednesday 4 December.

Lastly, Matua Rama blessed the kai and the meeting was closed at 6.20pm. • Erin Johnson



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