

One Point of View

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There's lots to fix

We have some of the worst roads in the country.

Have you noticed that the most notorious spots have remained the same despite millions of dollars thrown at 'maintaining' them every year? Why? The simple answer is that we are not fixing the foundations. While the potholes get a bit of fill or slap of bitumen, we don't resolve the underlying issue(s) that caused them.

So it is with our council. For years we have had complaints about service, poor communication, obstructive behaviour, and even the occasional whisper of possible corruption.

Following the council's significant loss to the Rintoul Group in the High Court recently, my calls for an independent review of our procurement procedures were supported by Mayor Carter. Such a review needs to be at arm's length from any staff. It must address concerns covering the past four years, since the Serious Fraud Office last investigated the council. This review needs to be widened to offer the community an opportunity to step forward with their concerns; not just procurement matters, but also other issues we have failed to address.

Like those pot holes, we need to get to the foundation of the problem and resolve the issues before we can move forward with confidence.

Some in the community believe many of the current problems can be traced to the senior leadership team, and call for them to be restructured or replaced. If even half of the complaints I have received from the public are true, this must be taken seriously. Claims that



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people are scared of retribution by council officers are alarming, and the council's current litigious attitude is costing ratepayers a fortune, with lawyers the only winners.

The other issue that has blown up in council's face recently is the proposed dog control bylaw and policy review. If my email inbox is anything to go by, hundreds of residents are shocked with the prospect of not being able to take Skip for a walk along the beach or give him some off-leash time when away from home. The draft policy provides just five dog exercise areas across the entire Far North District — one each in Kaitaia, Opua and Russell, and two in Kerikeri.

Now I have to admit to a conflict of interest, having dogs of our own.

I understand the issues of protecting wildlife and the problems that dogs, and more generally their owners, can cause. But what has me very concerned is that a council staff member associated with writing the policy has been actively signing people up to a Facebook page supporting it. This does little to instil confidence in an unbiased policy development process.

Obviously we are getting a lot of things wrong. If the reports about the numbers of people signing the petition calling for government intervention are correct, we need to act urgently and take bold steps to fix the very foundations of our council.

This will only happen when we restore open and transparent processes through which decisions can be scrutinised.