

Built for opportunity:

What businesses want to
see from councils across
the Canterbury Region.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2025

A message from business to council candidates:

Canterbury is at a pivotal time in its growth story. Our region is thriving and home to innovation, an abundant environment, and one of the most affordable, high-quality lifestyles in the Southern Hemisphere.

Sustaining our current success will take bold and coordinated leadership from our local councils. This document sets out the requests of our business community ahead of the 2025 local government elections.

At present and as a general rule, businesses view their councils as passive at best. The prevailing sentiment is often that councils are “not necessarily doing anything wrong, but not really out there gunning for businesses to succeed either.”

This middle ground is not enough for a region with Canterbury’s potential. To compete on a national and global stage, we need councils that are champions for growth and actively searching for opportunities to build for and enable more success.

That begins with a shift in mindset, and local government must see business not just as a group to consult with or regulate, but as a partner in achieving shared community outcomes. By adopting an enabler mindset, councils will help foster growth that creates jobs, attracts talent and investment, and builds resilience across our region.

To achieve this, councils must focus on their core services to keep Canterbury affordable for both households and businesses, and at the same time be bold and ambitious with capital expenditure. It must be said that across the region some councils do this much better than others.

Every dollar spent should deliver real, tangible value, with resources directed toward the areas of highest economic impact such as the infrastructure and services that underpin our economy.

At the same time, councils themselves must be built for growth. This means operating efficiently, streamlining processes, and removing unnecessary bureaucracy that slows progress. It also means ensuring staffing levels and capability are aligned to deliver core services effectively and responsively, giving businesses confidence to grow.

Finally, this work cannot be done in isolation. To unlock Canterbury’s full potential, councils must work together across the region, showing collective leadership and making bold, future-focused decisions that position us for long-term growth and investment. We have seen councils make progress on this through the Canterbury Ambition work lead by Business Canterbury.

We believe Canterbury has what it takes to become the most connected, prosperous, and future-ready region in New Zealand. The upcoming elections are an opportunity to set our region on that path and to build a future where businesses and communities continue to thrive.



Leeann Watson
Chief Executive, Business Canterbury

To-do-list for incoming Councillors

INVEST AHEAD OF DEMAND

Plan and deliver infrastructure before capacity is stretched, so Canterbury is ready to support future growth and investment.

BACK INNOVATION

Keep regulation simple, modern, and consistent across councils to encourage innovation and make it easier for businesses to grow.

PROTECT AND ADVANCE OUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Affordable housing and lifestyle sets our region apart. Support efforts to increase housing supply, and keep development costs manageable.

DEMAND MORE FROM PROCUREMENT

Simplify council procurement to deliver commercially relevant processes that deliver better value for money, consider whole-of-life costs, and give local businesses of all sizes fair access to opportunities.

GET THE BASICS RIGHT

Focus on and set KPIs for reducing compliance costs, improving local infrastructure, driving economic development and destination management, easing the rates burden for businesses, and speeding up consenting processes.

GET RATES UNDER CONTROL

Stop defaulting to rates rises by reviewing costs and cutting waste first, showing leadership to keep Canterbury affordable for businesses. Where rates differentials are applied, there should be separate and transparent reporting on how that is allocated across council budgets.

SPEND WHERE IMPACT IS GREATEST

Prioritise capital investment in projects that deliver the highest economic returns first, unlocking growth and future revenue to fund other projects.

DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Develop clear, coordinated economic development and destination strategies that have clear and measurable impact and outcomes. These should be built with business community support. Invest more in events that deliver both immediate economic benefits and long-term positioning gains. Make sure these strategies and plans are aligned and not competing across the region.

REVIEW ASSET OWNERSHIP

To ensure local government has the resources to build for the future ahead of demand, assess whether full council ownership of all assets remains appropriate. Explore opportunities for asset recycling or partnerships to fund growth priorities.

SHARE SERVICES AND REDUCE DUPLICATION

As a first step, collaborate across councils to reduce costs and complexity, with service sharing as a first step toward greater efficiency and consistency, and therefore better outcomes for businesses and communities. This would be a good alternative to amalgamation which often gets suggested by the business community as an option.

REFOCUS ON ENABLEMENT AND GROWTH

Councils must shift from enforcer to enabler, being champions and navigators for growth and creating the conditions for business to thrive. When businesses succeed, communities prosper and Canterbury's future is positive.

SPEED UP CONSENTING

Streamline and standardise consenting processes across councils, with faster and more relevant pathways for businesses, particularly where higher rates differentials are charged and value for that additional rate isn't obvious.

LISTEN TO BUSINESS

Engage regularly with the business community to understand their role in creating jobs and opportunities, and prioritise activity that builds growth. Consult early and be prepared to alter processes or decisions when advice is received – otherwise consultation is just lip service and erodes confidence.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Set clear success measures for supporting business growth and economic development, and report progress publicly to build transparency and trust.
