Welcome to the Wellington City Council’s 2008/09 annual plan. We are forecasting total operating expenditure of $329 million, which represents an average real rates increase of 5.18%, after allowing for growth in the ratepayer base.

We acknowledge that rising fuel and food prices are placing pressure on many household budgets, and that higher rates can add to that pressure. While we would have liked to hold the rates increase below 5.18%, doing so would have required cuts to the services we provide.

Although a small number of people who commented on our draft annual plan asked us to defer some work to keep the rates increase down, the balance of opinion was in favour of new projects, and there was opposition to non-urgent deferrals that we had outlined.

It is important to note that, while councillors have committed to some new initiatives such as making Courtenay Place safer and more vibrant, boosting online promotion of Wellington tourism, installing artificial turf on one of the city’s well-used sports fields, funding the National Children’s Arts Festival and an annual Pasifika Festival, and we’ve committed funding to make progress on bringing high-speed broadband to the city by 2012.

This year’s new projects add to our ongoing work programme, which includes key infrastructure such as the city’s water supply and transport and drainage networks, provision of parks and green spaces, plus funding of a wide range of events, recreational and social services, and work to guide the city’s building and development. As always, by far our biggest areas of spending are on infrastructure such as the water, drainage and transport networks.

We have also committed to some other new initiatives such as making Courtenay Place safer and more vibrant, boosting online promotion of Wellington tourism, installing artificial turf on one of the city’s well-used sports fields, funding the National Children’s Arts Festival and an annual Pasifika Festival, and we’ve committed funding to make progress on bringing high-speed broadband to the city by 2012.

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We received more than 400 submissions on our draft annual plan. Your views have informed our decision-making and helped us to alter or confirm our plans accordingly. Thank you to those of you who took the time to have your say about the future of our city.

We can all look forward to another fantastic year of progress towards making Wellington even better.

KERRY PRENDERGAST

Our vision is of Wellington as an affordable internationally competitive city.

It is also important to note that despite this year’s increase, Wellington rates are not high by national standards.

Finally, in the coming year we will be reviewing our entire work programme as we develop our next long-term plan, which will cover the period from 2009 to 2019.

As part of this review, we will be asking residents to take a close look at the work we do, and give us a clear indication of where we should draw the line between affordability and quality of service. We hope, from that feedback, to be able to develop a programme that meets residents’ aspirations for the city.

This is a key challenge – one that needs your input.

GARRY POOLE