

25 September 2026

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Labour Leader's Office

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Dear ██████████

Thank you for your Local Government and Official Information & Meetings Act request dated 18 August 2026 asking for the following information:

- 1. What was the total cost to the council for of all activities and work undertaken to develop and finalise its response to the Government's Head Start local government initiative? For clarification purposes, this request is for the total cost or the best estimate of the total cost to the council of the Head Start initiative. Points 2-5 below are for components of this total.*
- 2. What consultants and contractors were engaged to advise or provided information or analysis for the council's response to Head Start and what was the cost of each provider's services? What were the titles of any reports provided by these consultants or contractors?*
- 3. What was the total cost to the council for informing or consulting with local communities and how much was spent on surveys, advertising, informational publications (flyers, pamphlets, etc.), public meetings, websites and other such activities.*
- 4. What was the total cost of any extraordinary or special council meetings or workshops held regarding Head Start or the council's response to it?*
- 5. What other costs were incurred by the council under this initiative and what was the value of those costs?*

I am interested in costs from 5 May 2026 until the date that your response was provided to the Government.

The Councils Head Start activities were quite involved as at the same time, the Local Government Commission is undertaking an investigation into the organisation of all Southland Councils. Therefore, the messaging to the public involved two separate processes which needed to be clearly explained to the community so as to ensure good community engagement.

The Council contracted Sonia Gerkin who ran the public consultation, which involved:

- Establishment of the Public Engagement & Communication Strategy alongside the Mayor and Chief Executive
- Preparing Media Releases
- Facebook posts, messaging and responding to online questions
- Newspaper and Radio Adverts
- Videography with elected members explaining the Head Start and the LGC process for the public
- Setting up of the public engagement portal “Lets Talk”, including preparation of all public consultation documents, providing commentary for each option, including Frequently Asked Questions.
- Collection of hardcopy submissions
- Analysing submissions and providing a written report for Council

The total costs associated with engaging the community were \$21,547.32. This included consultant costs of \$20,498.32 and advertising of \$1,055.00.

There was no additional cost for the Lets Talk portal as this is a yearly subscription cost for all consultations.

The Council held two additional Council Meetings on 9 June 2026 and 4 August 2026 to discuss both Head Start and the Local Government Commission Investigation process. There was no additional cost to holding these meetings. All other Council decisions relating to Head Start were made during regular Council meetings.

The Council did not hold any public meetings, other than Council meetings.

The unaccounted cost is the redirection of staff time to respond to Councillors queries, media, additional reports for Council, LGOIMA responses, additional meetings with Mayors and CE’s to discuss Head Start (often outside of business hours), and in our case, navigating a very involved rates reform group. A significant amount of time was redirected to this process in order to meet the government’s timeframes.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Kind regards



Debbie Lascelles
Chief Executive