

Questions for Tāngata Tiriti Trustee Nominees - 2022

Name: Ruth Farrell

What is your position on the new proposals/recommendations that the Trustee Board shared with members on 16 May?

Do you support the current board recommendations for Ki te pae tawhiti? If there are any you don't support, please provide a brief summary of your preferred alternative solution to the current challenges that Playcentre Aotearoa faces.

What is one thing you would change about the current proposal, Ki te pae tawhiti, and why?

I want to respect the questions asked by answering them fully, but also make sure it's readable to people who don't have as much time, so, in short: I am broadly supportive of the new recommendations, although I do have some concerns, mainly around how the kaimahi role will function, the suggested voting system, and how the "independent centres" option will be implemented. If there were one thing I could change, it would be to have much more consultation time, but I do understand why the Trustee Board believes we don't have the time for this.

Before I give a longer answer, I want to clarify that while I'm a nominee for the Board, I'm also a regional representative, so I wear two hats here – or three, if you count my hat as a centre member. While I do, of course, have personal opinions about these proposals, as a rep my job is to carry the voice of members to national hui, and so regardless of my personal feelings for or against, in my position as regional representative, I will do my best to carry the voices of members to national hui, to pass on that feedback and to advocate for those concerns.

My second hat is as nominee, and actually my personal opinion is even less relevant in this case: by the time the new Tāngata Tiriti trustee is endorsed onto the Board, the Trust Deed will have already been either accepted or declined by centres and rōpū, so it's for that new trustee to follow the scenario they're given, not to actually have any say in the matter – it will all be decided before they even join the Board.

So, with that being said: broadly speaking, while I don't particularly like all the proposals, I can understand the reasons the Trustee Board is recommending them, and I think those reasons, unfortunately, are really legitimate.

First recommendation (create a new trust deed): Broadly support. The constitution needs to be changed – it's not fit for purpose, and doesn't comply with legislation, so that's just fact. I see two main questions arising from this recommendation: Should it be a trust deed? And if it should, what about the contents of the trust deed?

For the first, there has been some discussion over whether a charitable trust is the best form for our organisation, and it would have been good to have heard more background around this. But ultimately, in the position we are now in, we can either move forward with it, or stop and take a lot of time – possibly time our organisation doesn't have – to stall the whole process, go back to square one and re-evaluate everything. I see it as more important for our organisation to move forward.

In terms of the content of the proposed trust deed, I do have some concerns about a few aspects, but those details are still being ironed out, so I'm hopeful we'll be able to strengthen what's been proposed and get something really good for Playcentre Aotearoa, to take our organisation to new strengths.

Second recommendation (one vote per whānau): I have some concerns about the voting system proposed, as I see some weaknesses in this. I do like that it gives the power to the people. However, this needs to be done in a way that's consistently achievable (requiring 60% of all members to vote each time seems like a very high bar); and that doesn't put pressure to vote on members who actually don't care (which could lead to people making hasty or uninformed decisions just because they're told they need to vote).

Third recommendation (kaimahi appointment): Broadly support. I strongly hope that salaries will be raised, and I do have concerns about where the kaimahi will come from. But, if the kaimahi role can be implemented, I think this has the potential to be a real bonus for our centres. My main concern with the role (on the assumption that it is implemented as intended), is that the kaimahi might automatically replace the person responsible on every session, which could be a real overall cultural loss.

However, having a kaimahi would take so much pressure off the current persons responsible, and as one of these persons responsible, it would be great to have that pressure reduced. I hate the thought of our centres becoming more teacher-run and less parent-run, but to be absolutely realistic, this is already happening at a large number of centres, anyway.

So: I have concerns, about finding staff, about what those staff will do, about the impact on our centres. But I believe the potential benefits – reduced admin for our members, less worry and pressure, and more compliance of all those little bits and pieces that as members we might unintentionally let slip through the tracks – will, if the rest is done well, outweigh the negatives.

Fourth recommendation (whānau still responsible for running sessions): This I whole-heartedly support! This, to me, is what Playcentre is about – us, as the best and first teachers of our tamariki, coming together to make our children's and other children's time at Playcentre a loving, high-quality, play-filled, learning-filled experience.

Fifth recommendation (assets centralised): I do understand the worries people have about losing control of their finances, but I actually overall think, with the features that have been proposed like funds tagged, that this will be fine. While this is a new approach to finances in our organisation, it doesn't seem like a wholly untested approach in other, similar, organisations. I do think there will be some annoyance with having an extra step to take, and no doubt some teething issues when it's first implemented. But, again, I can understand the reasons behind the proposal, and I think it makes sense – as long as provisions are made such as ensuring there are small and more available budgets for centres, not locking centres in to all buying the same thing from the same place (allowing for different needs for different centres), and importantly, making sure those initial funds are well tagged and allowed to be used for those centres. If all that can be carried out, it sounds like a well-reasoned approach to me.

I care about Playcentre Aotearoa, and there are many centres struggling. I hear the concerns of centres that they might lose some of their hard-earned funds, but with tagging, that shouldn't happen. To me, one great benefit of this is that it will really help those struggling centres trying to stay afloat. When you look at what is best for Playcentre Aotearoa – for all those centres, in all areas – then this option, which prioritises looking after the struggling centres and ensuring more funding for all – does seem like a reasonable approach to me. It's not nice to think of "losing control" of our finances, but ultimately, if you look at the organisation as a whole – at what's best for *all* centres, across our organisation – I do think this model will work out for the best.

One thing I would change: In an ideal world, it would be great to have a lot more time to consider all this and go through lots more consultation. Unfortunately, in the real world, I don't believe we do have this time, and I do believe that the follow-on consequences of saying no to this trust deed could have extremely serious repercussions, which could be very hard for our organisation to recover from.

There are lots of small things I have concerns about, but I'm hoping that as members and as reps we can come together with the Trustee Board and find ways of working through these concerns. While there are some larger-scale things that possibly I'd have approached differently (or possibly I wouldn't have, because I don't have the same information the Trustee Board has), I don't believe it would be helpful for me to throw out vastly different ideas to what's being suggested – there is simply not enough time to implement any other very different ideas, and none of it is important enough to overshadow the whole business of what the Board is trying to accomplish, here. Right now, I think, our focus really needs to be on what we *can* do in the situation we're in.

What I would change: I see room for improvement in the Trust Deed. Right now, consultation is still open on that, and I'm much more interested in changing what I can change, than wishing the situation was different than it is. So right now, work on the Trust Deed (and Rules) is where I think it's important to focus, and that's where I'll be trying to help, to make this deed the best it can be for the overall, long-term benefit of all the centres that make up Playcentre Aotearoa.