

Gympie Regional Council - Meeting update - April 26, 2023

Thank you to everyone that was able to turn up for the council meeting today. Another good turnout with around 15 of us filling the public gallery. They know we aren't going away now and expect us to be present at their meetings.

A few interesting pieces of information were again delivered today. A full-time Homelessness Outreach Worker (funded by the State) commenced, alongside the establishment of the Department's Gympie Housing Service Office enabling residents to access local departmental support, rather than traveling to Maroochydore or being restricted to online/phone service.

Councillor misconduct matter – legal advice sought. At Council's Ordinary Meeting on 25 January 2023 was a item relating to a Councillor Conduct Matter of Councillor (Cr) Dan Stewart's and the Councillor Conduct Tribunal's (CCT) findings on this matter. This Item lay on the table as requested by Cr Fredman, with the following Motion carried. "Cr Fredman moved a motion for the matter to lay on the table until further legal clarification is provided regarding Council's rights in voting either for or against."

The legal advice has now been received as per Motion M05/01/12 and a summary of the advice was;

There is no "directive by the State Government" to vote either for or against a motion that a councillor has engaged in inappropriate conduct. Accordingly, the legal advisor does not consider that a councillor that votes against such a motion will be subject to disciplinary action for voting in that manner and;

There was no need for Council to pass a resolution noting the CCT decision.

The most interesting point of this matter is that the state government department does not require council or councillors to agree or disagree with the findings of that department's investigations. They simply advise council and councillors of their findings and there is no ability to reject the findings. This again proves that councils have no power of autonomy within their regions under the current system.

Item 6.1 Finance Report for March 2023

The financial report for 31 March 2023 shows overall operating revenue received of \$113.0m, which is \$1.9m higher than the year-to-date budget of \$111.1m.

The percentage of outstanding rates as at 31 March 2023 was 8.56% compared to 8.64% for the same period in the prior financial year. Reminder notices were issued at the end of March 2023. Again no discussion was held with regards to the level of debt held by council.

The report included 'The Statement of Financial Position', which compares Council's assets, liabilities, and community equity position to the previous financial year and for the period to 31 March 2023, and reported an increase in Community Equity of \$122.4m.

This improvement in equity is primarily due to a significant increase in the value of Council's Infrastructure, Property, Plant and Equipment due to impact of asset revaluations at the end of the previous financial year.

Excluding funds held in trust, total cash on hand at the end of March 2023 was \$96.2m and of these funds, \$95.8m is invested with the Queensland Treasury Corporation. Discussion was held following questions from Cr Polley, regarding other investment streams other than Qld Treasury with the finance team advising council has looked at other streams of investment but the cost to move the

investments were not feasible. Cr Devereaux asked what the costs were, and the finance officer stated Council staff costs to prepare and then monitor the investments.

Item 6.3 Procurement Panel

Interesting discussions were held regarding the contract extension for the provision of gatekeeping and recycling services at Bonnick Rd. Council staff submitted to Mayor and Councillors to approve the option of the one-year option on the contract with Endeavour Foundation for \$95,883.05 (GST inc) per month, be accepted. Council officers stated they will use the next year to determine if there is a business case to bring these services in-house prior to going back to the market with an improved tender contract that will address performance issues with current incumbent.

Councillors stated they request a workshop to discuss the contract as they had concerns Council Officers presented the recommendation to approve the final contract extension without any earlier consultation to the board (Mayor and Councillors). Councillors voted to leave the recommendation on the table until a workshop is held to review the options available to council. Two important points are clearly identified with this item;

Firstly, council officers think they run council, and

Secondly, the point raised by Cr Waldock the recommendation was placed before the board without prior consultation, reflects exactly what has been discussed at our My Place Gympie meetings, that councillors and mayor hold the same liability and responsibility as board of directors of a company as identified in the Qld Local Government Act 2009, s11 Local government are bodies corporate.

At the completion of the meeting, we had the opportunity to question Cr Devereaux regarding a number of the above-mentioned items where council staff are demonstrating they run council and expect councillors to rubber stamp their recommendations and that we the people expect councillors to act in the best interests of the public. Cr Devereaux was understanding of our views. We also took the advantage to raise our concerns that the local council was having little or no say in what happens in the region but is directed by the Qld government departments. We stated that we expect the CEO, Mayor and councillors to act in the best interests of the people from within this region and when policies are drafted and recommended from Brisbane that the CEO, Mayor and councillors advise Brisbane that is not what the local ratepayers and residents want in our location. It was very interesting the response was "like 15-minute cities. They might work in Brisbane but not here". This clearly indicates that we have the capability to work with the mayor and at least one councillor to raise concerns with this happening in our region.

Another question asked of Cr Devereaux was discussion during the January Ordinary Meeting he stated that he was pleased to have the agenda item for correspondence from the public would be tabled at the ordinary meetings. We asked him following the large number of emails, letters and face-to-face contact recently regarding the drag tag comedy show, no reference was mentioned during the meeting. Cr Devereaux advised that the communications were discussed in-house. When asked what was required for the communications to be reported in the ordinary meeting, he stated that he thinks there is an opportunity for the public to make a submission to speak at the council meetings through the standing orders, but councillors cannot offer any support either way of the matter presented.

The Standing Orders of Gympie Regional Council section 44.6 allows that the chairperson may invite a member of the public to take part in the proceedings of a meeting. This is something we can look into having our say on important matters and will follow up as and when the opportunities arrive.

We will keep the pressure up.