

Gympie Regional Council Meeting - 25th October 2023 - Update

Thank you to those that could attend Wednesday's meeting. It was great to see we had the numbers that we usually have to fill the public gallery to maintain our presence.

Since attending the meetings of the corporate council since January, we have always taken the opportunity at the completion of their meeting to have a say with Mayor, councillors or CEO. This week we were able to speak with one councillor and make her aware of the UN Agenda 2030 following discussions regarding fluoride in the town water. The councillor asked if we could forward her any information regarding agenda 2030 so she could research it. We had an interesting conversation with the CEO regarding 15 minute cities planned across the world and we asked him if he had recently attended the 15 minute cities conference at the Gold Coast, to which he said he hadn't.

Again, we took the opportunity to state the UN Agenda 2030 which is being enshrined in all local governments across Australia. We raised our concerns about fluoride in the town water and was it being removed as Gympie town water is one of only 17 council areas across Queensland that still fluoridates the water. He was reminded that fluoride is a class 2 poison, to which he and the mayor advised it is being reviewed. He was then advised that we will assist them in the decision with a petition to council making them aware of their liabilities and request the removal of fluoride from the water. We also took the opportunity to advise the CEO that he holds the responsibility to delegate all powers over council's local laws and that his role as CEO is ensure the people of Gympie region have a say in the review of any and all of those local laws when reviewed. The CEO advised that the public would have input at the first draft of the review.

We intend to hold them to account when that time is due and we the people will be advising council as to whether the laws are in the best interests of the people.

Item 6.1 – Quarterly Questions Taken on Notice Report

This is a document that includes council's framework, its strategic plan that is vital to ensure this council is effectively responding to the immediate and emerging needs of the community, but when reviewing the attached Questions Taken on Notice Answers (June – October 2023) from the 23 August meeting regarding Item 6.1 "Clarification requested on full time employees currently employed with Council with a comparison of employee numbers from 2020 with employee numbers in 2022 and 2023", no information is made available to the public as the information was provided to councillors via a counsellor briefing report at the councillor workshop / briefing on 11 October 2023 which is NOT open to the public.

Item 6.2 – Councillor Portfolio Report

The purpose of this policy is to outline the roles for councillors within their allocated portfolio and the responsibilities of relevant staff members under this policy. One of the most interesting points within this policy is that section 4 refers to the Human Rights Commitment. Council considered the human rights protected under the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld) when adopting the policy. The policy states that council will act in a way that is compatible with the human rights to meet the objective of the Act. This seems laughable when from 2019 council denied the human rights of the ratepayers and public when it applied

mandates that affected the human rights of individuals but is now an important piece to included when protecting councillors and staff.

Cr Milne discussed the risks to councillors being identified in the policy with the council officer stating council wants to be open and honest with ratepayers and residents that is why council presented this report to help councillors during the caretaker mode coming in following the calling of the election date next year.

The council officer stated there is a council and public interest that the local councillor knows through workshops what is happening in their division. Cr Milne stated that the policy would change what is happening in their division as to what is happening now as she stated works get undertaken in her division where she is not aware of.

The mayor stated he was taken back by Cr Milne's comments with the use of the term "considerable change" as he identified council could do better with the communication but thought there had been considerable changes made to communicate with councillors from the workshops to keep councillors informed of their divisions. He stated that he wouldn't think that a pot hole repair in an area would need to be communicated but there is an open invitation to councillors to attend the portfolio meetings and the ability to consult with other councillors regarding their portfolio's that may affect their own division.

The mayor stated this policy is about how council communicates and is within the Corporate Plan which includes how council communicates.

Cr Milne stated she objected to the changes to the policy. She indicated the policy is not an improvement and should be left to the new council for review next term. The mayor spoke in favour of the policy and thought that council shouldn't wait to the new council for the sake of waiting. He thought that better communication from committees to allow councillors to attend portfolio meetings and forums would improve councillor involvement.

Item 6.3 – Gympie Local Disaster Management Plan

Council has engaged a newly appointed manager to oversee the Gympie Local Disaster Management Plan (LDMP). The manager advised that following the review of the LDMP several recommendations were made to meet certain guidelines under the Qld Disaster Management Standard. The manager stated that recently council held a expo for the emergency services in Gympie with a small but significant group. The manager stated that following the flood events in Gympie Region last year it was needed to improve the arrangements that prevent, where possible, or minimise the impact of disasters or major emergencies on communities of the Gympie Regional area.

Cr Polley asked if there were a number of sub documents that goes with the plan, to which the manager stated there are a number of documents that are required to go through a desktop review for the LDMP. Cr Polley asked that the public often ask for live telemetry of the flooding so they know what the water levels are in the areas, is this something that could be made available to the public.

The council officer stated that council has the Disaster Dashboard that they direct the public to but some of the telemetry is owned by other departments such as Department of Transport and Main Roads and other departments that are responsible to update the information onto the dashboard.

It is interesting to note that in the glossary of terms within the LDMP the WHO is included in the acronyms.

Item 6.4 – Caretaker Period Policy

The holiday mode appears to be nearing with the preparation process for the upcoming local government election, with officers from the Governance, Integrity and Risk Branch identifying that a Caretaker Period Policy would be beneficial to both Councillors and council staff. What about the ratepayers and residents?

Cr Polley stated that he thought the policy was unfair to sitting councillors during the election period but was happy to proceed with it. Again, this policy contains section 4 referring to the Human Rights Commitment. Council considered the human rights protected under the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld) when adopting the policy. The policy places a number of restrictions to council, councillors, and council staff from when nominations are called. Candidates should take particular care in campaign activity to ensure that there can be no possible perception of use of council provided resources and/or facilities for the activity that could be perceived as having electoral benefit. It is noted that council must continue to undertake council meetings at least one per month. Councillors must differentiate their roles as Councillor or candidate during the caretaker period to ensure their actions cannot be perceived, as obtaining a unfair electoral advantage due to their role as Councillor. This will be interesting to watch during this period after observing these Councillors in action for the past 10 months.

6.5 Procurement Panel

This report was to support current and future community needs within the Gympie region, Gympie Regional Council (council) is seeking to refresh its Register of Pre-Qualified Suppliers (RPQS) for the provision of Mechanical Maintenance Services. This contract was for an initial 24-month contract which expired on 26 July 2023; however, the arrangement has been extended for a further 12-month period and is now due to expire on 25 July 2024. There were five submissions with 3 of those found not to be conforming and the two remaining submissions and council moved to accept the two conforming Tenders received from AC Hargreaves Pty Ltd and Pensar Construction Group Pty Ltd and that they be added to the Mechanical Maintenance Services panel arrangement expiring on 26 July 2024. Both are local companies.

6.6 September 2023 Financial Report

The Statement of Financial Position compares Council's assets, liabilities and community equity position to the previous financial year and for the period to 30 September 2023, which shows a **decrease in Community Equity of \$132.1m**. The reduction in equity is **primarily due to the removal the rail infrastructure assets from council's asset register** which is partially offset by the improved cash balance at 30 September 2023. These assets were gifted to the Rattler Company without consultation with the owners (The People).

The cash at hand keeps increasing with higher investments in Qld Treasury, excluding funds held in trust, total cash on hand at 30 September 2023 was \$115.6m and of these funds, \$114.9m was invested with the Queensland Treasury Corporation, \$0.25m invested with Auswide Bank and \$0.25m

invested with Bendigo Bank. According to the council officer, Council is constrained by legislation on council investments. How interesting!! At who's benefit?

The cash balance includes constrained funds of \$69.3m which are made up of the prepayment of grant funds, the prepayment of the state waste levy, infrastructure charges and provisions for rehabilitation of landfill and quarry sites across the region.

The higher than forecast cash balance has resulted in increased interest and investment revenue received to date on council's investments and term deposits and higher than forecast interest charged on overdue rates. The percentage of outstanding rates at 30 September 2023 has increased as compared to last year. The percentage of outstanding rates at 30 September 2023 was 17.74% compared to 16.43% for the same period last year.

Reminder notices were issued on 29 September 2023 and any outstanding rates and charges balances will be monitored in accordance with Council's outstanding rates and charges collection policy and procedures.

The operational revenue variances contributing to this result include Rates, Levies & Charges \$535,000 is attributed to an increase in the number of rateable properties included in the first half year rates calculation.

Interest and Investment Revenue \$451,000 attributed to a higher than forecast cash balance has resulted in increased interest and investment revenue received to date on council's investments and term deposits and higher than forecast interest charged on overdue rates.

It begs the questions:

- Why does council keep increasing its spending when there is significant financial stress within the community?
- Why does council continually increase rates year after year when council (the people's money) has \$115.6M in cash reserves?
- Why does council continue to increase rates, levies, fees and charges when council has a carryover of operating surplus of \$25.4m carried over to the 2023-2024 financial year budget that included works that did not get completed in the last financial year?

When asked by Cr Polley, regarding the carryover capital expenditure, would that increase the current budget when included?

The council officer stated the unspent CAPEX will be carried forward to this year's budget BUT will be included in this year's budget BUT will NOT increase this year's budget!!! No explanation was given as to how this could be the case and clearly Cr Polley was as confused as those sitting in the public gallery.

This is exactly the reason why an external audit by the people and NOT Qld Treasury should be undertaken to undertake a forensic examination of where ALL the money from ratepayers and residents goes.

Remember, as we have continuously heard from council officers, mayor, and councillors throughout the year, "this is a business and we have to treat it as one". The position of the people is the least of their

concern because they must comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act and the Local Government Regulations as directed by Brisbane.

This is a significant reason why we made the CEO and Mayor aware of our position at the end of the meeting. They are there to represent the people of the region, NOT Brisbane.

6.7 Budget Amendment – First Quarter Budget Review

After the close of the 30 September 2023 financial period, a review of actual financial performance against the 2023-24 Original Budget was conducted by council officers. The report recommended that Council's 2023-24 Budget, amended on 27 September 2023 be further adjusted **to reflect an increase** in the net operational result excluding extraordinary items to \$0.76m, decrease the net operational deficit to \$5.61m and maintain the 2023-24 capital program at \$111.96m.

6.8 Quarterly Investment Report to 30 September 2023

The purpose of this report is to advise Council on the performance of its investment portfolio to 30 September 2023. With interest rates now trending upward and the influx of cash invested (mainly from the receipt of the first half year rates levied and grants received), actual interest received by council to 30 September 2023 was \$417.9k more than the year-to-date forecast.

7.1 Community Grants Program 2023/2024 - Round 1 Funding Recommendations

A total of 39 applications were assessed with \$454,249 requested from applicants for the categories listed in the table. Two applications were assessed as ineligible (namely, one being an ineligible applicant, the other erroneously submitting two applications). Officers recommend funding 22 of the 37 eligible applications to a total of \$195,827.

7.2 Arts and Cultural Strategy 2023-2028 and Public Art Policy

The Gympie Regional Council Arts and Cultural Strategy 2023-2028 is developed in the context of three key policy documents:

- Commonwealth of Australia 2023, Revive: A place for every story. A story for every place – Australia's cultural policy for the next five years
- Queensland Government, Creative Together 2020 - 2030: A 10-Year Roadmap for arts, culture and creativity in Queensland
- Gympie Regional Council Corporate Plan 2022-2027.

One only has to look up these policy documents to see where the direction is headed with the funding.

8.1 Infrastructure Services Directorate Report - October 2023

Council continuing to experience the ongoing effects of the prevailing construction industry market conditions in terms of internal and external resourcing limitations, the Operations Roads and Drainage staff are taking the necessary steps to triage customer requests and the backlog of road network defects to ensure the highest risk works are actioned as a priority.

Discussion was held around the lack of water supply to Southside residents due to system design and residential growth in the area. Council is taking steps to install temporary inline pumps to boost pressure.

Water carters have been identified as a problem to the supply rate and have been put on notice to fill from other locations. A long term solution is to reactivate the disused water tower that was decommissioned quite some time ago but significant works need to be done to the electrical switchboard and the power supply has been disconnected. Cr Stewart stated that it is a good reminder to council more money should be spent on sewerage and water and not taken out of the operational budget.

8.2 Rationalisation of Council's Land Holdings

As previously advised at Council Workshops on 5 October 2022 and 8 February 2023 and the February 2023 Ordinary Meeting, a key deliverable of the Operational Plan is to review all Council owned land that is surplus to its needs and obtain approval for disposal.

Phase 1 reviewed land held in Fee Simple (freehold) that was flagged for disposal during a review undertaken in 2018 to ascertain if there had been any change to Council's current or future requirements in relation to these lots.

Most of the lots from Phase 1 had already been presented to Council for a Resolution to dispose of apart from the following lots which required further investigation by **internal stakeholders** which has been completed and the lots are considered surplus to Council's requirements:

Balkin Street, Gunalda Lot 2 SP285926 and Wide Bay Highway, Goomeri Lot 3 RP111243. Note, NO public consultation has been engaged to make these decisions with public assets. Unbudgeted income will be received from sale proceeds net of the costs of disposal. Authority was delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to invite written tenders, negotiate the sale amounts of the subject properties on terms satisfactory to Council and complete the transfers to successful purchasers.

8.3 Consent for State to dispose of land held in trust by Council - Lot 9 CPLX899, 3470 Mary Valley Road

Council received a request from a neighbouring landowner to consent to their application to purchase State Land held in trust by Council located at 3470 Mary Valley Road and described as Lot 9 CPLX899. and it is a reserve held in trust by Council for sanitary purposes. It is described as Lot 9 CPLX899, R400. It has an area of 4.047 ha. The Trustee Lot is currently landlocked by the neighbouring farm. Even though it abuts Mary Valley Road it does not have any constructed access to Mary Valley Road due to a large culvert and heavy vegetation that runs in between the lot and the road and therefore the current access is through the neighbour's land. The land is not being used by Council for sanitary purposes nor any other purpose. Confirmation has been received from Council's Environment and Resource Recovery division that there is no current or future requirement for this land for sanitary purposes. Council resolved to agree to the revocation of the reserve and agrees to consent to the State Application by Adam and Sabine Farrell (or a Company owned by them) for the purchase of the whole of Lot 9 CPLX899.

Cr Devereaux stated council was returning the land to the trustee being the state government.

<https://www.gympie.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/4734/2023-10-25-ordinary-meeting-agenda>