

Gympie Regional Council Meeting update – 24 May 2023

Thank you to everyone that was able to turn up for the council meeting yesterday. Another good turnout with around 20 of us filling the public gallery. We were again welcomed to be present at their meetings. This is a sign that how we conduct ourselves we are getting recognised.

A few interesting pieces of information were again delivered yesterday but again there is information not being discussed at the meetings but included in the report attachments which are not included in the information presented at the meetings. It is our responsibility to ensure we are investigating what details are being bypassed through the current standing orders of council meetings. There are no requirements for council officers to detail the summary of items included in the report being placed before councillors to vote on the recommendations from council at the meetings. The agenda items put on the webpage is a 217 document with all report details being voted upon by councillors at the end of the document under attachments.

Some of the items on the table not discussed include;

Item 5.1 Action Report for Quarter Three – 2022/2023

The action list found on pg 53 of the report includes information regarding the in-principal agreement to delegate to the CEO authority to finalise and sign the asset sale and purchase agreement with the Rattler Railway Company Ltd. In the document it states under reference number 2630219 M08/03/23 – Rattler Railway Company LTD Due Diligence, that council agrees to the relinquishment by the Rattler Railway Company Ltd, of the railway corridor from Amamoor to Imbil and refers to the CEO to negotiate a lease by Council of this corridor. This was decided in a WORKSHOP held with the Rattler Railway Company Ltd on 12 May 2023 and an additional board meeting scheduled 22 May 2023. There was no further update issued at the council meeting as identified in the report.

The question is, why did the CEO think it was NOT of sufficient importance to issue an update to the public as identified in the action items list attached to the meeting agenda? What is the CEO not making public to the ratepayers and residents of the Gympie Regional Council area? The Councillors voted to accept the recommendation noting the report without discussing the major item of the Rattler.

Item 6.1 – 2023-24 Fees and Charges Adoption

Council has the legislative capacity to adopt a schedule of fees and charges as part of its annual budget process. Cr Polley asked the question to the council officers, “Does the public get to know the percentage increase of the fees and charges”? The council officer replied that CPI is running around 6.5% and that council had reviewed the costs to council and that council tried to keep the increase to be around 5% less than CPI.

Cr Deveraux asked the question, “does council have to increase fees and charges annually”? It was noted in discussion the CEO has the delegated powers to waive any fees and charges from council but it was made very clear from the Director of Corporate Services that council is required under Section 97 of the *Local Government Act 2009 (the Act)* where the Act provides council with the ability to fix cost recovery fees, that there is a requirement under the Act to review fees and charges annually. When asked by Cr Deveraux what do other councils do the Director replied that they all review their fees and charges annually and increase to what they see fit.

The question is, does council not work for the people? Are council there to provide a service the people? Are the ratepayers expected to keep paying for these fees and charges when the rates are reviewed and increase annually. Why does a council with approximately 55, 000 residents have excluding funds held in trust, total cash on hand at the end of April 2023 of \$91.2m and of these funds, \$90.5m was invested with the Queensland Treasury Corporation when we have an Operating expenditure at 30 April 2023 totalled \$106.5m. In the 2023-2024 financial year, fees and charges are forecast to produce approximately \$8.6m in operating revenue.

This is about raising money for the Queensland Treasury Corporation. Cr Stewart, Cr Deveraux and Cr Milne spoke in favour of the increase with Cr Stewart stating he agreed there was a need for the increase. Cr Deveraux stated they were minimal, and most people won't be affected.

Cr Deveraux sought clarification of the hardship policy asking about the percentage attached to rates arrears and if there was any ability to reduce the current rate when in hardship. Cr Polley asked if there was any wriggle room on the percentage rate applied to ratepayers. The council officer advised that currently the rate was around 5% but was around 11% last year but the percentage may increase depending on what the Qld government sets the rate at. Does this ring alarm bells yet. These corporations are about profit, not about service to the people.

Item 6.3 April 2023 Financial Report

It was noted that 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 30 April 2023 shows reports an increase in Community Equity of \$89.5m. It is interesting to note, that previous queries from our group to council to provide a list of council owned (on the behalf of the people) assets was not released as it was determined by council, it would not be in the best interests of the public and therefore a RTI request would need to be applied for council to be able to investigate if it could issue the list only if council saw it as in the best interests of the people.

Of particular note was the discussion raised by Cr Stewart in regard to the recent auction result where one of the properties listed for forced sale due to rates arrears was passed in at auction. The council officer advised that the value set for the sale was the unimproved value of the property, and the auction did not meet the reserve price. Cr Stewart made the comment, "I would have thought it would sell for what was owing on the rates outstanding". Does this sound like a councillor who is working in the best interest of the people? I will let the people make up their own mind on that. This will be quite clear in the YouTube recording when released.

Item 6.4 Corporate Services Directorate Update Report to 30 April 2023

CCTV

Link Enterprise Solutions are currently building the CCTV network for phase 1b. The sites included are the Gympie Waste Management Facility, the Gympie Saleyards, the Monkland Quarry, the Dog Pound and the Imbil township. The provision of CCTV access to the Imbil Police Station has also been incorporated into the design to allow monitoring of local CCTV assets.

The final phase component of the tender, Phase 1c is in planning and design with final pricing to be submitted for budget approval. The sites under consideration are Tin Can Bay Library, Wes Mitchell Park, Billabong Skate Park, Rainbow Beach Hall and Library, Kilkivan Equestrian

Centre, Gympie Aquatic Centre, Gympie Civic Centre, Gympie Aerodrome, Laurie Hansen Park, Rainbow Beach Foreshore, the Tin Can Bay Police Station and the Phil Rodgers Park.

Cr Deveraux asked the question everyone present wanted to ask, why is a small regional council providing CCTV to Qld government Police stations? Wouldn't the state government have its own budget to cover the installation? The Director of Corporate Services advised that it was mutually agreed to with QPS and council. So the Qld government sets the fees and charges for councils, sets the percentage rate for rates arrears, directs councils to review and increase costs to the rate payers, increases land valuations annually not three yearly now and still requires ratepayers to foot the bill for its responsibilities. Are we getting it yet!!

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) BYOD has begun to be offered to employees with a receptive uptake by staff. BYOD will increase the number of staff that are able to utilise mobile devices for work which allows Council to promote the use of more mobile apps and communication strategies that then allows employees to engage, collaborate and contribute in new ways that are more effective, efficient and timely.

Cr Devereaux made a statement regarding emails not being responded to, presumably by council officers and included he wanted to ensure the work life balance of staff answering emails and phone calls out of hours. Well, what can you say. For those who were in attendance anyone would have thought we were witnessing a mayoral debate. The mayor took offence to Cr Devereaux's statement and warned him it was not appropriate for him to speak about staff that way. Cr Devereaux took offence to the mayor's statement and they exchanged niceties for a while.

Item 6.5 Procurement Panel

This report provided a summary of the Panel's activities including items endorsed by the Panel for procurement, but which exceed the financial delegation of the Chief Executive Officer. Cr Smerdon asked what could be done to assist the mum and dad contractors that used to be able to provide good service to council but aren't getting recognised anymore? The council officer advised that there is a system for grading applicants and that the successful applicants met the required criteria. He stated that there was an opportunity for those local, people to gain employment through the successful tenderers. Cr Mine said that she used to be a cleaner for council and understands it's hard for mum and dad contractors, but we follow the system and support the system!!

Item 6.6 Memorandum of Understanding – University of the Sunshine Coast

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) has developed Partnership Agreements with the local governments in which its campuses are located – Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast. USC would now like to establish a similar Partnership Agreement with Gympie Regional Council to form the basis for future collaboration between the two organisations.

Student Bursary Program:

Under a future Partnership Agreement with USC, Council could consider providing several small bursaries to assist students from the Gympie region with the costs of attending university. Bursaries range from \$2,500 per student per annum. Council could for example consider offering bursaries of this nature to students undertaking courses which align with Council priorities. Cr Fredman suggested there be a bursary to help local youth to be supported to give locals the chance to stay in the area and gain university qualifications as there was a severe lack of qualified people coming to the area.

Item 6.7 Community Grants Program - Funding Recommendation

The Kilkivan Great Horse ride Association Inc (KGHR) on 27 April 2023 applied for a grant from Council to bring the Kilkivan Great Horse Ride back to the area. The Kilkivan Great Horse ride Association Inc (KGHR) offers Guided Trail Rides and Horse events. It is a celebration of the characteristics and aspects of the communities' culture. The horse-riding trails are central to the community identity. Inclusion of community interests bring local districts and visitors from afar together. The request was approved at the council meeting to the sum of \$12,088 with special conditions applied being that prior to the release of grant funding, the applicant must provide the following items to Council's Community Development Team:

- a. Resubmitted budget complete with quotes attached for all items over \$1,000
- b. A copy of its current Public Liability insurance certificate (refer to item 4 in Community Grants Program Guidelines 2022/2023).

<http://www.gympie.qld.gov.au/.../2023-05-24-ordinary-agenda>

Late Agenda Item 6.8 Notified Motion - Delegation for appointment of Acting CEO

PROPOSAL submitted by Cr Deveraux

Allowing for short term situations where the CEO is on annual leave, sick leave, personal leave, at conferences etc. it is proposed to bring the delegation of these powers back under the umbrella of the full Elected Council. The mayor made a statement that the information regarding the 2014 meeting item which allowed the mayor to recruit and select the CEO was not how the recruitment of the current CEO's position was run and that all councillors were included in the position recruitment. There was heated discussion between the mayor and Cr Devereaux regarding follow up meeting minutes that identified the situation was changed from the reference item Cr Devereaux had tabled for discussion. The mayor warned Cr Devereaux of his comments for the second time at which Cr Devereaux took offence. Cr Milne questioned why the item had been tabled for discussion as she didn't see any benefit in the item being discussed.

The Director of Corporate Services advised the policy allows for the mayor to do the recruitment and includes a degree of a silent process to ensure no candidates are under investigation to be eligible to be included in the process. The mayor stated that there is no right for councillors to know if someone is not eligible if under investigation.

There were two recommendations tabled in the item from Cr Devereaux that were Council:

1. Hereby removes the 25 June 2014 power delegated to the mayor by elected Council to appoint an Acting Chief Executive Officer under s195 of the Local Government Act 2009 (Act) and in accordance with s257(1) of the Act.
2. In accordance with s257(1) of the Local Government Act 2009 (Act) council hereby delegates the power to appoint an Acting Chief Executive Officer under s195 of the Act to the Mayor for periods of up to two (2) months, or no longer than two (2) Ordinary Meetings.

Cr Devereaux agreed to extend the period to 4 months following discussion and then agreed to lay the matter on the table until seeking further legal advice on the matter.

It would appear that the pressure is on the council to be more accountable, but through the lack of discussion on important matters affecting the ratepayers and residents we will keep the pressure on them for accountability.

<http://www.gympie.qld.gov.au/.../2023-05-24-late-ordinary...>

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