

Weddin Shire Council Additional Special Variation

20 June 2022

Our decision

Weddin Shire Council applied for a permanent Additional Special Variation (ASV) for a percentage increase in its general income of 2.5% in 2022-23. The rate peg for Weddin Shire Council in 2022-23 was set at 0.7%. The council budgeted for a 2022-23 increase of 2.5%.

We have assessed this application against the three criteria set by the Office of Local Government (OLG). We found that Weddin Shire Council's ASV application fully met all assessment criteria.



We have approved Weddin Shire Council's application for a permanent 2.5% Additional Special Variation in 2022-23 (including the rate peg). Our decision means the council can increase its general income by 2.5% in 2022-23 and permanently keep this additional income in its rate base.

Table 1 Approved ASV – Weddin Shire Council

	2022-23
Increase above the rate peg – permanent	1.8%
Rate peg	0.7%
Total increase	2.5%

Our decision means the council can increase income by 1.8% above the rate peg. We estimate this to be around \$0.05 million in additional income in 2022-23 which it can keep in its rate base going forward. This allows the council an extra \$0.3 million over the next 5 years. The impact on rates from this ASV may be different for individual ratepayers and across different ratepayer categories. The ASV represents an allowed increase in general permissible income, the council decides how it collects that income from ratepayers.

The ASV process

On 6 April 2022 the OLG announced guidelines for the Additional Special Variations (ASV) process for 2022-23 under [circular 22-07](#) (ASV guidelines). IPART has assessed applications from NSW councils for an ASV against the ASV guidelines.

The council planned for a 2.5% increase in income

Assessment criterion 1: *The application amount is not higher than the lesser of 2.5% or the council's assumed 2022-23 rate peg (including population factor) in its 2021-22 Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) documentation.*

Weddin Shire Council's 2015-16 Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) as part of its IP&R documentation budgeted a 2022-23 rate peg of 2.5% which matches Weddin Shire Council's ASV application for 2.5% in 2022-23. Weddin Shire Council's most recent set of IP&R documents were adopted in 2015-16. As 2021-22 IP&R documents are not available, we have used the council's preceding documentation to assess this criterion.



The increase the council applied for matches the increase in income it budgeted in its planning documents.

Council supports the proposed increase in income

Assessment criterion 2: *The council must have made a resolution which clearly states:*

- *that the council has resolved to apply for the special variation under section 508(2) of the Local Government Act 1993 (the Act)*
- *whether the resolution is for a temporary or permanent special variation under section 508(2) of the Act*
- *the additional income that council will receive if the special variation is approved, and*
- *why the special variation is required*
- *that the council has considered the impact on ratepayers and the community in 2022-23 and, if permanent, in future years if the special variation is approved and considers that it is reasonable.*

Weddin Shire Council resolved on 28 April 2022 to apply for a permanent special variation under section 508(2) of the Act. The council estimated it would receive around \$0.05 million of additional income in 2022-23. The council stated that the special variation is required to ensure that Weddin Shire Council has the financial capability to meet the rapidly rising inflation rate, staff award increases of 2% and Council's limited income streams. The council stated that it considered the impact on ratepayers to be reasonable.



The council resolved to apply to increase its income by 1.8% above the rate peg or by \$0.05 million in 2022-23. It explained the reasons why the ASV is required, and the council considers the impact on ratepayers to be reasonable.

The council demonstrated financial need

Assessment criterion 3: *The council's 2021-22 IP&R documentation forecast an average Operating Performance Ratio (OPR) of 2.0% or lower over 2022-23 to 2026-27 or it has provided other evidence of need. For example, but not limited to that the council needs to maintain a higher OPR so it can meet its capital funding requirements.*

The OLG describes the OPR as measuring how well local councils contain expenses within revenue.^a The OPR represents what portion of a council's revenue is remaining after expenses. A positive OPR represents a surplus in income and a negative OPR represents a shortfall in income.

Weddin Shire Council's 2015-16 LTFP forecast an average OPR of 10.0% over 2022-23 to 2026-27. This forecast is above the 2.0% threshold in the ASV guidelines.

Table 2 Weddin Shire Council's OPR – 2022-23 to 2026-27

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	5-year average
OPR	10.5%	3.6%	12.2%	11.9%	11.8%	10.0%

Weddin Shire Council has proposed the use of an adjusted OPR for our assessment of financial need. We consider that it is reasonable to use an adjusted OPR for our assessment to take into consideration the change in circumstances since the initial forecasts were made in 2015-16.

In its application Weddin Shire Council noted that since publishing its 2015-16 LTFP its budgeted versus actual financial position has changed dramatically. It noted that investment and interest revenue had decreased by 88% while depreciation increased by 28% and other expenses increased by 88%. It stated that its 2015-16 LTFP forecasts are no longer an accurate outlook for the council's finances.

It has provided financial forecasts from its 2022 update to the LTFP that is on exhibition during May and June of 2022 before planned formal adoption in June of 2022.^b We accept that the more recent LTFP forecasts more accurately reflect the council's financial position and current economic conditions.

Using the adjusted OPR Weddin Shire Council forecasts an average OPR of -18.4% over 2022-23 to 2026-27. An average OPR at or below 2.0% over the next 5 years demonstrates financial need.

Table 3 Weddin Shire Council's Adjusted OPR – 2022-23 to 2026-27

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	5-year average
OPR	-19.1%	-18.7%	-18.3%	-18.1%	-17.7%	-18.4%

^a NSW Auditor-General, *Report to Parliament | Report on Local Government 2018 | Appendix 9 – OLG's performance indicators from the audited financial statement – Descriptions*, February 2019, p 78.

^b These updated forecasts and the council's proposal to consider an adjusted OPR are available on IPART's website [here](#).



The council's application shows that, when considering updated forecasts, it has a forecast average OPR of below 2.0%. This demonstrates a financial need for the additional income.

Summary of submissions

Weddin Shire Council's ASV application received 1 submission. The stakeholder raised concerns around affordability and with the poor condition of roads and footpath infrastructure in the council. In resolving to apply for the ASV the council did consider the impact on ratepayers and it considered it to be reasonable. The strong financial need demonstrated by the council's latest LTFP forecasts indicates that it may struggle to maintain its infrastructure without this ASV.

The stakeholder also raised concerns with turnover in councillors. We note that this is outside of the scope of an ASV assessment.