

Media Release

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Our Place, Our Future – Options for a Sustainable Lithgow

Lithgow Council has commenced an extensive process of community engagement on two options to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the council.

This follows independent review of the council's financial position following many years of deficit budgets. The review identified a shortfall of \$6 million in Council's annual general revenues.

"Council faces growing challenges to maintain community assets and services at existing levels because income has not kept pace with costs." said Craig Butler, General Manager, "As a result, decisive action has been taken to contain costs and increase revenue. Notwithstanding, the deficits will continue if nothing changes into the future and that is not sustainable."

The two scenarios, which have been developed for community consideration, are:

Option 1 – Service levels are able to be maintained

Council would apply for a permanent increase in general rate income (a Special Rate Variation) above the peg rate set by IPART. The extra revenue would allow

services, including critical assets, to be maintained because income would match the cost of delivery.

“Of course, a rate increase will challenge some in our community. For that reason, great care has been taken to use all the levers we have to reduce the impact on the ordinary person. While the amount that would be raised equates to a 42% increase in overall rates, the residential portion of the rates pool would only contribute 26%. It is also important to note that this proposal relates only to land rates.” Mr Butler said.

Option 2 – Service levels are reduced

If Council chooses not to proceed with a rating increase, a comprehensive review will be undertaken of services with a plan presented to the community for a reduction in levels of service. This would involve prioritising essential services and reducing more services that are discretionary. The focus would be managing risk, including closure or removal of unsafe infrastructure.

On this option Mr Butler stated, “This is equally challenging because the services we provide each day matter to people. In fact, our surveys confirm they would like us to deliver more services and to a higher standard.”

“Council understands that the community will have questions regarding these options. We intend to have an open and frank conversation with the community and provide people with all the information they need to make an informed decision,” continued Mr Butler. “We have set up a dedicated website www.ourplaceourfuture.lithgow.com. All ratepayers will shortly receive an information pack in the mail and the Council will be hosting community information sessions and pop-up cafés across the city to ensure participation”.

Save the date to attend a community information session near you:

- Crystal Theatre, Portland – Saturday, 13 August from 1pm
- Union Theatre, Lithgow – Saturday 20 August from 1pm
- Wallerawang Community & Sports Club – Saturday, 27 August from 1pm
- Capertee Memorial Hall – Saturday, 3 September from 10am
- Hartley Old School Hal – Saturday, 17 September from 10am
- Rydal Showground Hall – Saturday, 24 September from 10am.

Council acknowledges that not everyone has access to the internet, so workshops will be held across the rural areas. People can phone 6354 9988 to make an appointment to meet council staff who will answer questions.

- Hampton Halfway Hotel – Wednesday 17 August
- Cullen Bullen Hall – Wednesday 24 August
- Glen Davis Community Hall – Wednesday 31 August
- Cranbrook School, Wolgan – Wednesday 14 September
- Monkey Creek Café, Dargan – Wednesday, 21 September
- Mumma Snow's Café, Tarana – Wednesday, 28 September.

Council has also developed a Rates Calculator, which is available on the Our Place Our Future webpage, www.ourplaceourfuture.lithgow.com. To use the calculator, you will need to know the valuation of your property that is set by the Valuer General. This value is based on the land value only and does not include any improvements such as buildings. The valuation of your property can be found in the financial details section of your rate notice.

“Council is committed to both meeting the needs of our community and ensuring a successful future for the city”. said Mr Butler “To help us to make the best decision for the Lithgow local government area, I encourage you to have your say on the options put forward. This is another chance to shape the future of this city.”

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