



**PRODUCTIVITY & COST CONTAINMENT REPORT
PREPARED FOR LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL**

NOVEMBER 2022
STRICTLY PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL



HEAD OFFICE – VICTORIA

Level 1, 100 Fyans Street
South Geelong VIC 3220
PO Box 1374
Geelong VIC 3220

Phone: 1300 500 932
admin@ctman.com.au

QUEENSLAND

Suite 16 Capalaba Business Centre
39 Old Cleveland Road
PO Box 1057
Capalaba QLD 4157

Phone: 61 7 3390 1685
queensland@ctman.com.au

NEW SOUTH WALES

PO Box 8128
Koorringal NSW 2650

Phone: 1300 500 932
admin@ctman.com.au

TASMANIA

PO Box 337
Newstead TAS 7250

Phone: 1300 500 932
admin@ctman.com.au

www.ctman.com.au

ACN: 072 083 795
ABN: 15 072 083 795

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CT Management Group P/L PO Box 1374 GEELONG VIC 3220 Mobile: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED] Web: www.ctman.com.au	6147- Productivity Improvement & Cost Containment
	Project Manager: [REDACTED]
	Author: [REDACTED]
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1. INTRODUCTION

The *Liverpool Plains Shire Council* (LPSC) comprises of **5,086** square kilometres and is located on the northwest slopes and plains region of New South Wales.

The predominant industry is agriculture, with emerging tourism, and support industries developing throughout the area.

The four main urban areas of the Shire are Willow Tree, Quirindi, Werris Creek and Currabubula, which contain over **70%** of the total population.

Council has focused on four key strategic target areas that emerged from the community engagement process to establish its *Community Strategic Plan* in 2021 (revised in May 2022):

These are the dynamic links that LPSC will use to plan to meet its social, environmental, economic, and civic leadership requirements to foster a more enhanced, engaged community.

The *Community Strategic Plan* provided a vehicle for each community to express its long-term aspirations. The *Resourcing Strategy* is a critical link when it comes to translating strategic objectives into actions.

The current *Resourcing Strategy* includes:

- An *Asset Management Strategy* to align Council's asset services with the needs of the community.
- The *Long-Term Financial Plan* to ensure sufficient funds are available to meet Council's contribution to achieving the objectives identified and the delivery of asset and related service.
- A *Workforce Management Plan* which identifies the staff and skills required to resource the four-year *Delivery Plan*.



2. COUNCIL'S OBJECTIVE - SUSTAINABLE COUNCIL

LPSC has a clear objective to be both an organisationally and financially sustainable council.

Organisationally sustainable councils have the right strategic leadership, organisational capability and capacity, as well as financial capacity to deliver over the long-term on their Community Strategic Plan, other strategies and service commitments.

A financially sustainable council, as defined by the NSW Government, is one that over the long-term is able to generate sufficient funds to provide the level and scope of services and infrastructure agreed with its community through the IP&R process (NSW Government, 2012).

Financial sustainability has been translated into five key principles contained in chapter 3 of the *Local Government Act 1993*, which Council must commit to:

- Council must achieve a fully funded operating position reflecting that Council collects enough revenue to fund operational expenditure, repayment of debt and depreciation.
- Council must maintain sufficient cash reserves to ensure that it can meet its short-term working capital requirements.
- Council must have an appropriately funded capital program where the source of funding is identified and secured for both capital renewal and new capital works.
- Council must maintain its asset base by renewing ageing infrastructure, which is identified, and by ensuring cash reserves are set asides for those works which are yet to be identified.
- Council must maintain adequate resources to meet ongoing compliance obligations.

IPART has tended to look at council's operating performance ratio, net cash position, infrastructure backlog and infrastructure renewal ratio to understand the financial need for the SRV.

It considers what gap the SRV is to address, is it to improve declining assets or to maintain services? Is a permanent increase warranted or will a temporary SRV suffice? This depends on the financial needs being addressed.

3. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to analyse the areas of focus - past, present and future - by LPSC when targeting efficiency and cost containment efforts towards a sustainable Council.

This paper proposes setting LPSC an aspirational target of achieving the Office of Local Government (OLG) Operating Performance Ratio benchmark of >0% in the long term for Councils General Fund.

Council has made significant progress over the past two financial years towards this achievement and has given itself the opportunity to consider this target.

It must be clearly noted that the target is aspirational and needs to consider the impacts of how Councils financials are treated from an accounting perspective compared to the how assets are physically managed and maintained.

It is possible for a Council to have an Operating Performance Ratio benchmark of <0% and be able to maintain its assets when and as required (for example, Councils may record FRS assets that have a book depreciation and negative impact on Councils Operating Performance Ratio benchmark but do not require any cash input from Council).

The other material factor is Council needs to review its useful lives of the assets from an accounting perspective post the completion of the TAM to apply the assessment of the condition of the relevant components.

	Actual	Actual	Budget
LPSC General Fund	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Operating Performance Ratio - General Fund	-41.20%	-23.58%	-17.25%

4. EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is a measure of whether the optimal amount of resources have been used to delivery an output, process, service, or activity.

An efficient process achieves the objective with the minimum amount of resources – whether that be time, expenditure, human resources, or materials.

A more efficient service or process produces the same output with less inputs.

Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness. Effectiveness measures whether the objectives of a process, service or activity has been achieved as intended.

A complete *Service Review* assesses both efficiency and effectiveness.

It is important to note that while reducing the cost of delivering a service is often the main driver for improving operational efficiency, if the costs are reduced to an extent that the effectiveness of the service is impacted then the cost cutting exercise is not purely about efficiency but also a reduction in the “level of service” and subsequently service effectiveness.

Economics commonly defines three different types of efficiencies:

1. **Allocative efficiency** refers to using resources to produce the highest value.

2. **Productive efficiency** refers to the optimal combination of inputs that results in the desired amount of outputs at minimal costs.
3. **Dynamic efficiency** occurs over time, as innovation and new technologies reduce the production costs.

This report includes consideration of all three types of efficiencies.

Council has implemented improvements in the allocation of resources to produce the highest value – improvements in the asset maintenance planning and capital works decisions informed by good asset management are prime examples.

5. SERVICE EFFICIENCY FINDINGS

It is important to note that while the following findings are focused on service efficiencies – with the effective reduction in costs – there are instances where the effectiveness of the services Council provides have been enhanced.

The following information outlines where Council has invested the **16.64%** temporary special variation (SV) consistent with the resolution of Council on 27 November 2020, which was also indicated to the community during the consultation period in December 2020/January 2021.

5.1 Allocative Efficiency

5.1.1 Transportation Network

When Council made application for the IPART variation in 2020/21 it emphasised the need to increase its funding in asset renewal and maintenance.

The following section details the progressive increase in investment and the *Transport Asset Management Plan* (TAM) forecasts for renewal and maintenance for the next 10 years.

Council has significantly increased maintenance expenditure and investment in renewal of its road's infrastructure. Based on Councils most recent plans, the transportation network comprises of the assets displayed in the below table/:

Asset Category	Quantity	Replacement Value
Regional Roads	199 km	\$92,631,142
Sealed Local Roads	310 km	\$113,692,370
Unsealed Local Roads	812 km	156,911,256
Bridges	199	73,409,532
Footpaths	23 km	5,352,491
Stormwater Pits	1060	3,128,155
Stormwater Pipes	19 km	10,833,287
Kerb & Gutter	60 km	5,636,359
	TOTAL	\$461,594,592

The assets are valued at fair value to replace with assets providing the same function and capacity:

- Replacement cost **\$461,594,592**
- Depreciable amount **\$381,720,384**
- Depreciated Replacement Cost (WDV) **\$394,363,776**
- Depreciation charge **\$9,430,000**
- Depreciation / WDV **2.4%**
- Average life of assets **42 years**

What does it cost?

The forecast lifecycle costs necessary to provide the services covered by Council's Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAM) includes operation, maintenance, renewal, acquisition, and disposal of assets.

Although the TAM Plan may be prepared for a range of time periods, it typically informs a Long-Term Financial Planning period of 10 years.

Therefore, a summary output from the AM Plan is the forecast of 10-year total outlays, which for the transportation asset class is estimated as **\$117,006,928** or **\$11,700,693** on average per year.

Council's TAM Plan has been prepared on the basis of Council receiving the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) of **8%** in 2021/22, **8%** in 2022/23, and **8%** in 2023/24. Council only received a two year, 8% per year, temporary SRV approval.

Without further SRV applications to mitigate loss of revenue at 30 June 2023, Council's TAM Plan will have a renewal funding gap of **\$11,744,480** over the **10-year** period. This would result in Council having to defer renewal works, and increase reactive maintenance such as heavy patching, resulting in reduced service levels and overall deterioration of road assets.

What Council proposed to do in TAM

Over the previous **5** years, Council's asset renewal ratio reported in Special Schedule 7 has averaged **56.62%**.

With the three years of 8% SRV included, the estimated available funding for the 10-year period is **\$115,748,152** or **\$11,574,815** on average per year as per the Long-Term Financial plan or Planned Budget.

This is **98.92%** of the cost to sustain the current level of service at the lowest lifecycle cost.

The infrastructure reality is that only what is funded in the long-term financial plan can be provided. The informed decision making depends on the TAM Plan emphasising the consequences of Planned Budgets on the service levels provided and risks.

With the forecast budget and known Asset Management Plans, the anticipated planned Budget for transportation assets leaves a shortfall of **\$125,878** on average per year of the forecast lifecycle costs required to provide services in the Asset Management Plan compared with the planned Budget currently included in the Long-Term Financial Plan. Council will be seeking to address this gap through a combination of increased operational efficiency and increased grant funding. Should this gap not be able to be addressed in the short to medium term Council will need to have further conversations with the community regarding service levels and revenue.

Summary of future renewal costs

Forecast renewal costs are projected to increase over time if the asset stock increases.

The forecast costs associated with renewals are shown relative to the proposed renewal budget in Figure 5.4.1. A detailed summary of the forecast renewal costs is shown in Appendix D of the Council's TAM.

Councils renewal costs are approximately **\$6.0 million** p.a. following the peak investment of **\$6.9** million in the 2022/23 financial year.

What Council has funded

In 2020/21 Council spent **\$6.37m** total on roads, with **\$1,080,512** of Council's own source revenue spent on roads.

In 2021/22 Council spent **\$10.71m** total on roads, and increased Council's own source expenditure to **\$3,714,614** – a **41%** increase in investment.

In 2021/22 this gave Council an increase of:

- **25.1km** of resealing (up from **13.5km** 2020/21)
- **21.8km** of sealed road rehab (up from **0.35km** 2020/21)
- **48.4km** gravel re-sheeting (reduction from **62km** 2020/21)
- **350m** kerb and gutter renewal (nil in 2020/21)

In 2022/23 Council has budgeted **\$11.81m** on roads and increased Council's own source revenue contribution by **\$4,814,614** - a further **29%** increase in investment.

For 2022/23 Council is targeting to deliver:

- **26km** reseal
- **27.4km** sealed road rehabilitation
- **2** bridge replacements
- **65km** gravel re-sheeting

The reseal quantity aligns with Councils renewal targets within its adopted TAM Plan.

The rehabilitation lengths are actually above target; however, this is scheduled to commence addressing Council's renewal backlog.

Council's targeted lengths are:

- Resealing per annum **26.1km**
- Rehabilitation per annum **13.05km**

Accordingly, the investment in roads has increased since 2020/21 by **\$5.44m** from **\$6.37m** to **\$11.81m** in the 2022/23 Budget.

It is widely accepted that a maintenance approach reliant upon reactive maintenance is highly inefficient.

Transitioning from reactive to scheduled maintenance, with a review on Council's methodology on unsealed roads maintenance has produced **20-50%** in the cost efficiency of maintenance, as well as providing a planned approach to the risk management of asset failure.

Council's optimised approach to maintenance has included improved documented technical levels of service in the TAM Plan, that provide a trigger for maintenance based on the criticality/risk of the asset and the functional hierarchy of the asset. Council's approach is also designed to optimise the life of assets based on current condition and reduce overall expenses.

A program of asset inspections informs the programming of scheduled maintenance, with sufficient capacity to respond to reactive maintenance as needed (assessed against the triggers for maintenance).

Financial Sustainability and Projections - Sustainability of service delivery

There are two key indicators of sustainable service delivery that are considered in the TAM Plan for this service area.

The two indicators are the:

- Asset Renewal funding ratio (proposed renewal budget for the next 10 years / forecast renewal costs for next 10 years), and
- Medium term forecast costs/proposed budget (over 10 years of the planning period).

The Asset Renewal Funding Ratio is an important indicator and illustrates that over the next 10 years Council expect to have **99.87%** of the funds required for the optimal renewal of assets.

Medium term – 10-year financial planning period

The TAM Plan identifies the forecast operations, maintenance and renewal costs required to provide an agreed level of service to the community over a 10-year period.

This provides input into 10 year financial and funding plans aimed at providing the required services in a sustainable manner.

This forecast work can be compared to the proposed budget over the first 10 years of the planning period to identify any funding shortfall.

The forecast operations, maintenance, and renewal costs over the 10-year planning period is **\$10,397,973** average per year.

The proposed (budget) operations, maintenance and renewal funding is **\$10,297,095** on average per year giving a 10-year funding shortfall of **\$100,878** per year.

This indicates that **99.03%** of the forecast costs needed to provide the services documented in this AM Plan are accommodated in the LTFP.

These calculations exclude acquired assets, which is not generally a material issues for Liverpool Plains Shire Council.

Providing services in a financially sustainable manner requires a balance between the forecast outlays required to deliver the agreed service levels with the planned budget allocations in the LTFP.

A gap between the forecast outlays and the amounts allocated in the financial plan indicates further work is required on reviewing service levels in the TAM Plan (including possibly revising the LTFP).

Demand Management

The impact of demand drivers that may affect future service delivery and use of assets are shown in Table 4.3 of the TAM.

Demand for new services will be managed through a combination of managing existing assets, upgrading of existing assets and providing new assets to meet demand and demand management.

Further, given Council's agriculture industry, working to shift industry to more efficient vehicle combinations will also provide for reductions in the cost to maintain the network. This is identified as part of Council's Economic Development Strategy to improve the freight efficiency on Council's road network.

Demand management practices can include non-asset solutions, insuring against risks and managing failures.

Climate Change Adaptation

The impacts of climate change may have a significant impact on the assets Council manage and the services they provide. In the context of the Asset Management Planning process climate change can be considered as both a future demand and a risk.

Additionally, the way in which Council construct new assets should recognise that there is opportunity to build in resilience to climate change impacts.

Building resilience can have the following benefits:

- Assets will better withstand the impacts of climate change
- Services can be sustained
- Assets that can endure may potentially lower the lifecycle cost and reduce their carbon footprint

The impact of climate change on assets is a new and complex discussion and further opportunities will be developed in future revisions of this TAM Plan.

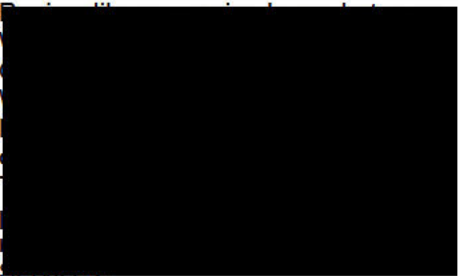
5.1.2 Allocative Efficiency Options

The following details savings achieved to date and proposed savings still under investigation:

Name	Estimated Value	Has Council implemented?	Financial Savings Budget for FY 2022/23	Potential annual savings for budget in future years
ACHIEVED \ IN-PROGRESS				
Review building maintenance services including the option to engage a firm to provide an array of building maintenance.		Expected to be completed by July 1, 2023	\$30,000	TBC
Contractors – agency staff replaced by FTE			\$270,000	Further investigation required.
Undertake Service review for mowing services		Service Review completed	\$120,000	\$120,000
Verge mowing – one pass as opposed to 2 passes			\$56,000	\$56,000
Review security contract arrangements to lock in a more consistent monthly fee	\$5,000	In progress	\$2,500	\$2,500
Review opportunities for staff to undertake works outside their substantive role where it provides for a better outcome for all parties.		Works around trade services panel	\$10,000	\$10,000
By department, establish an annual % based on the time it takes to fill vacant positions. Then reduce the Wages/Salary budget by % amount.	-	Factored into Budget	\$335,000	\$335,000
Review administrative support to reduce costs of contractors (for example Council currently uses Contractors to prepare tender documents. Still might need contracts for some part of specification but the tender document themselves can be delivered internally).	\$20,000		\$20,000	\$20,000
Review opportunities to hire full time staff to undertake a number of currently ad-hoc functions	\$78,000	In progress	\$30,000	\$30,000
PROPOSED \ POTENTIAL OPTIONS				
Review aquatics facilities including consideration of undertaking expressions of interest for appropriate contractors to lease and operate swimming centres	TBC	TBA		1 month of wages.
Annual targets set to seek external funding to reduce current operational costs.	\$100,000	TBA		\$100,000
Investigate shared services for services where Council struggles to recruit and retain staff and/or contractors	\$100,000			\$100,000
Continue to review of Councils asset information and the associated depreciation values. Investigate why and where depreciation can be reduced. Council is spending around \$5M p.a. on roads and depreciation is \$9m p.a.	\$250,000			\$250,000

5.2 Productive Efficiency: Cost Containment through Service Reviews

LPSC is committed to continuous improvement to ensure the ongoing financial sustainability of the Council. Service reviews to obtain efficiencies remaining outstanding include:

Name	Estimated Value	Has Council implemented?	Financial Savings Budget for FY 2022/23	Potential annual savings for budget in future years
ACHIEVED \ IN-PROGRESS				
Review non-core services (eg CHSP) that could be provided by specialist providers that would create a win-win situation for Council and the community		CHSP not included in 2022/23 Budget.	\$97,000	TBC
Review community grants program to ensure the value outweighs the services foregone by Council in providing this program	\$22,000	Done	22,000	
Airport fees			\$5,000	TBC
PROPOSED \ POTENTIAL OPTIONS				
	\$100,000	N/A		Further investigation required.
Review Councils building assets for opportunities to rationalise the asset base.	\$97,000	TBA		\$100,000
Review Councils commercial operations to ensure they are operating at full cost recovery..	-			
Seek to have the caravan park managed by a third party under a contracted arrangement	\$35,000			
Review optimisation of in-house and outsourced construction and maintenance work and contract.	\$200,000			

5.3 Dynamic Efficiency: Cost reduction through innovation

The following details savings achieved to date and proposed savings still under investigation:

Name	Estimated Value	Has Council implemented?	Financial Savings Budget for FY 2022/23	Potential annual savings for budget in future years
ACHIEVED \ IN-PROGRESS				
Implement project management framework with object of saving 1% of capital spend.	\$800,000	PM framework underway.	\$300,000	\$100,000
Creation of a rotating energy fund to reduce Council's ongoing energy costs and move towards carbon neutral power.			\$40,000	Ramping by \$20,000 per annum
Review Credit Card Fees. Consider passing associated costs for refunds of rates and water as customers.	\$12,000	In progress	\$12,000	TBC
PROPOSED \ POTENTIAL OPTIONS				
Review the use of credit cards to optimise procurement process and reduce admin overheads of low value transactions	\$5,000	N/A		NIL
				Further investigation required.
Energy saving initiatives to reduce energy consumption costs (long-term)	TBC			
Provision of smart water meters for all residential water customers within the shire, reducing the need to manually read meters.	\$500,000	Investigations in progress		\$35,000

6. REQUIREMENTS TO ACHIEVE BENCHMARK TARGET

Going into the 2023/24 budget cycle, council needs to determine its own preferences as to how it may achieve the desired financial outcomes from the various options including those contained within this paper.

The modelling hereunder suggests that through a combination of:

- Required permanent SV application and approval in 2023/24; and
- Targeted efficiency improvements.

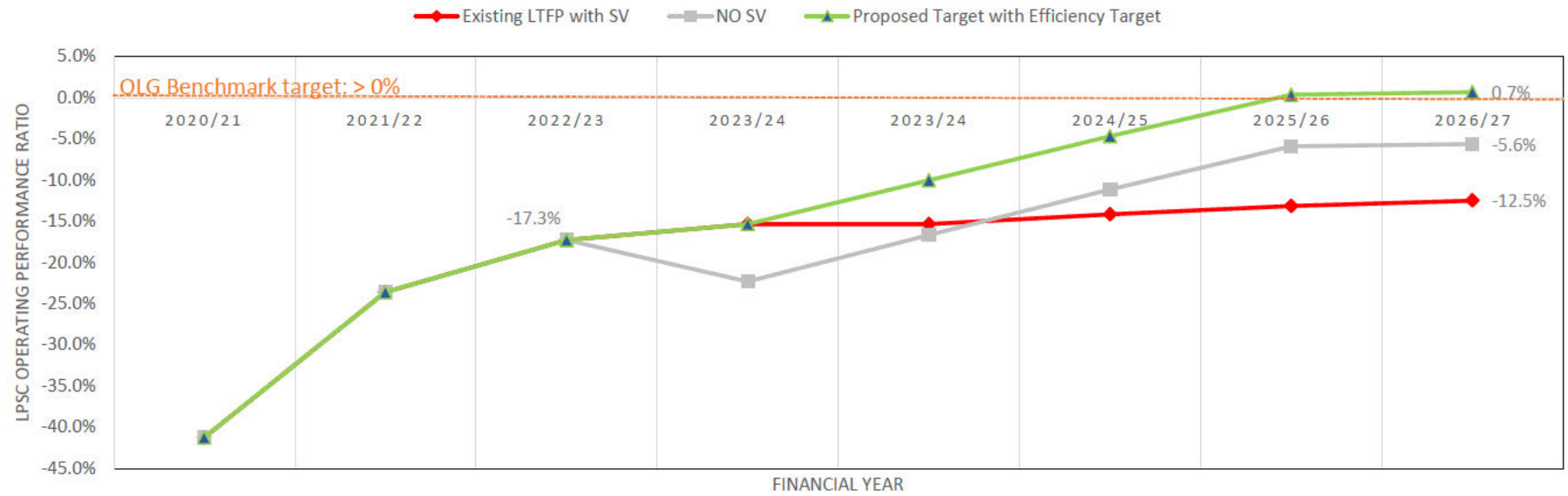
That Liverpool Plains Shire Council has substantially increased its ability and has the potential to move towards the NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) Operating performance ratio benchmark of >0%.

To achieve this outcome, LPSC would need to achieve **\$3.2M** in savings over the coming years and given the relative health of cash available (though under internal restriction) a significant portion of this could be achieved through both operational and accounting treatment reviews and improvements.

It is critical to note this is based on no further cost shifting from other levels of government and also makes the assumption that the NSW approved rate peg will cover the real increase in costs associated with managing Councils assets.

It is also important to note that Council has been making efficiency gains over the past ten years, since the introduction of the Fit for the Future program, and until further reviews are undertaken it cannot be guaranteed that further savings of \$3.2M is realistic for Liverpool Plains Shire Council.

LPSC OPERATING PERFORMANCE RATIO SCENARIOS



7. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

The most recent community survey in 2022 told Council the community's priorities, including that non-core services are highly valued even if not well used. For rural councils, a key challenge is the breadth of services that Councils provide due to market failure, lack of government agency presence, and community demand.

As part of the process of the special rate variation, Council needs to consider and determine if there are any cost containment strategies that can be implemented, considering the community's needs.

The community's highest priorities from the engagement process to date are:

- well-constructed roads
- access to health and support services
- ensuring Council is financially sustainable
- securing the water supply
- keeping the community informed.

Please note that increasing or maintaining current services and service levels will need additional funding which may require a permanent special rate valuation.

To reach as many members of the community within the Liverpool Plains Shire as possible, empowering them to put forward their ideas and visions for the Liverpool Plains of the future. We followed the guide to public participation:

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

The aim of the community consultation process was to collaborate with the community to develop the Community Strategic Plan to help guide Council's direction and operations.

Reasonable impact is not the same as adverse impact.

A tax increase will have an adverse impact on ratepayers, but assessing whether it is reasonable considers:

- the ratepayers' ability to pay.
- the ratepayers' willingness to pay when considering the financial need being addressed.

Being clear on the detail with the community is critical. In Council's SRV application, LPSC will demonstrate that it has consulted with its community on the proposed increase. This includes:

How has council engaged with the community? Did they have and execute a clear plan?

- Has it been clear with the community on the need for the SRV?
- Is the amount of the SRV clearly articulated?
- Has it engaged specifically with groups that may be more impacted by the SRV? That is, if the SRV is focused on business rates, have businesses been adequately engaged in the process?

**HEAD OFFICE – VICTORIA**

Level 1, 100 Fyans Street
South Geelong VIC 3220
PO Box 1374
Geelong VIC 3220

Phone: 1300 500 932
admin@ctman.com.au

QUEENSLAND

Suite 16 Capalaba Business Centre
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