

Canterbury Bankstown Council is seeking to increase and/or change rates as follows:

1. to harmonise councils' rating structures by 1 July 2021 following the amalgamation of the former Bankstown and Canterbury Councils.
2. to increase the minimum rate above the statutory level.
3. to request a special rate variation (SRV) which will amount to a 36% increase in our rates by 2025.

I support the proposed rates harmonisation including the request to increase the minimum rate above the statutory level. However, I strongly object to the proposed special rate variation as the increase is exorbitant and will cause financial stress for my family and the broader residential community. Additionally, Council has not demonstrated a need for the SRV and has not undertaken adequate consultation with the community.

Council says it needs the SRV to "ensure its long-term financial sustainability". I note that one of the justifications for the forced council amalgamations between Canterbury and Bankstown in 2016 was that it would deliver financial efficiencies so the SRV begs the question, why hasn't amalgamation delivered the benefits promised?

Additionally, recent media reports and parliamentary estimates hearings have shown that the State Government has mishandled the Strong Communities Fund which aimed to support forcibly amalgamated councils. It appears that this money has flowed to councils in Coalition seats. But why should our ratepayers be forced to bear this cost? Why isn't Council putting pressure on Government to provide funding from the Strong Communities Fund?

The SRV is exorbitant

The Extraordinary Council report of 4 February 2021 provides a table on p 53 that shows the total cumulative percentage increase to ratepayers will be 36.34% over 5 years.

Inner West Council (IWC) which is adjacent to Canterbury Bankstown Council is going through the same harmonisation process, but has not proposed a SRV. This means that the new CB Council rate by 2024/25 will be almost double the rate of the Inner West Council residents who live only a few blocks away. I am not aware that our neighbours in IWC are receiving lesser services than us, so how can CB Council justify the additional SRV cost?

There are a number of assumptions Council has made in the SRV application that can be challenged:

Council claims that the 36.4% of the LGA population that rent (ABS 2016 census) will not be impacted by the SRV rate increase. The truth is that landlords will pass the SRV rate increase in full, probably with a margin. Businesses that rent properties will also be impacted in the same way.

Council also claims that lower income households are not owners of properties who pay rates. The truth is that 24% of CBCity rate payers are pensioners, including ourselves.

Inadequate Consultation

The consultation on the Rates Harmonisation and SRV was undertaken over Christmas/New Year 2021 which was a time when many people would have been on holidays. Covid 19 restrictions were also in place which would have stopped many people from attending information sessions. The timing of the consultation has significantly reduced rate payers ability to properly engage with Council to understand what the real impact of the Special Rate Variation would be.

Council has advised that approximately 650 rate payers had direct communication with Council which is about 0.5% of households and business or 0.17% of the LGA population. This converted to 147 submissions to Council about the Rate Harmonization and SRV. Numbers this low cannot be used to support an argument of effective community engagement.

The pamphlet "One Rate System because we are one city" that was distributed to households, focuses on the need for harmonisation and does not clearly explain the impacts of the SRV. For example it does not provide the percentage increase that would result from the SRV. The table under "What this means for you" and "How are your rates spent?" obscured detail in the second last point under the tables advising that the waste levy was not included. Anybody perusing the table would be likely to assume that the 25/26 \$ amount in the last column was the total amount and therefore it would not appear to be significantly greater than what they already pay in rates as the \$figure does not include the waste levy.

It appears that Council has endeavoured to embed both Rate Harmonization and the SRV within the "One Rate System because we are one city" message as a way of misleading and confusing rate payers. It would have been preferable for Council to have undertaken the Rates Harmonisation process to meet the deadline of 1 July 2021 and then if they so desired to seek a SRV as a separate issue once the harmonised rates had been adopted. A separate process for the SRV would provide transparency and clarity to rate payers.