

OFFICERS REPORTS**5 SPECIAL RATE VARIATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM****FILE NO:** C-114-7 12/13**REPORT BY:** GENERAL MANAGER

Summary:

- It is our intention to apply to IPART for Special Rate Variations in early 2014 ready to commence in the 2014-15 financial year.
- To be successful in our application we must undertake a program of community engagement to involve our community in determining the level and timing of Special Rate Variations they are willing to support.
- This report outlines the purpose and key elements of the proposed program of community engagement, and recommends that the program be endorsed.

Council Delivery Program and Budget Implications:

This report deals with the proposed program of community engagement for our intended application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for Special Rate Variations to commence in the 2014-15 financial year, and supports our long term goals of Engaged Community and Effective Governance.

Report:

It is proposed to apply to IPART for Special Rate Variations in early 2014 ready to commence in the 2014-15 financial year. To be successful in our application we must have completed the review of our Integrated Plans and undertaken a program of engagement to involve our community in determining the level of Special Rate Variations they are willing to support.

A workshop for Councillors covering the planned community engagement program and the need for Special Rate Variations as indicated by our Long Term Financial Plan was held on 8 May 2013. Among Councillors who attended the workshop there was general support for the long term financial direction and the community engagement program explained at the workshop. Comments made by the General Manager in relation to Council's long term financial outlook and the financial challenges confronting local government in New South Wales also resonated with Councillors.

This report outlines the purpose and key elements of the proposed program of community engagement.

Purpose of the engagement program

The engagement program is intended to gain broad community support for Special Rate Variations (SRVs) to commence in July 2014. Through engaging the community in a collaborative decision making process around the SRVs, we aim to determine:

- appropriate service levels and infrastructure condition;

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- whether or not some services should continue to be provided, and if not, which ones should be discontinued and when;
- the size and timing of the SRVs.

The SRV engagement must also satisfy the expectations that IPART has for SRV applications, and thus maximise the likelihood the application will be successful.

Key elements

The key elements of the engagement program are:

1. A Project Steering Group, formed to guide all aspects of the process of engagement.
2. A Deliberative Working Group, a randomly selected representative sample of the Canterbury community, with which a series of conversations will be conducted about the challenges facing council and the ways in which they could be resolved
3. Engagement of the broader community whereby the conversations with the Deliberative Working Group can be made as publicly available as possible, and feedback can be gathered. This may include a statistically valid survey towards the end of the process.
4. Council and organisation support.

Project Steering Group

The Project Steering Group (PSG) provides governance – guiding all aspects of the collaborative decision making process. Whilst the members of the group must have an appreciation of the content – the challenges facing council and the ways in which they could be resolved – process is their focus. The PSG is to comprise the Mayor, General Manager, the Director Corporate Services and five or so community leaders. The best size for this group is eight persons. The PSG will be formed as soon as possible through a process of inviting nominations and interview. The PSG is likely to meet about four times over the duration of the project (May 2013 – March 2014).

Deliberative Working Group

The Deliberative Working Group (DWG) is a randomly selected representative group from the City of Canterbury community. It is with this group that the conversations about the challenges facing council and the ways in which they could be resolved will be explored. The intent is that the conversations that are held with this group are representative of the kind of conversation that could be held with any group of stakeholders in the future. This group will question, test and probe, and will provide an opportunity for council to enquire of them, in a way that more thoughtfully and thoroughly examines the problem and solution than can be done with the whole community.

The group will comprise up to 25 randomly selected people representative of stakeholders in the City of Canterbury. The DWG is likely to meet about six times over the duration of the project. People interested in having a say about the issues will be invited to talk to the members of the DWG.

Engagement of the Broader Community

Alongside the conversations with the DWG are activities to engage the broader Canterbury community, in order to make these conversations as publicly available as possible, and to gather feedback.

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The means by which this is done effectively will be guided by the PSG. Channels such as viewing galleries in our community centres and libraries, our website, a blogging website such as Bang the Table or such, could be used. Any point at which council currently touches community members will be used if possible. This will also include information in rates notices; newspaper articles and council column; early learning centres and other children's services, business events, festivals, and our advisory committees. A telephone survey is also planned to confirm outcomes of the process in late November 2013.

Council and Organisation Support

Council support will be vital to the success of this project. Councillors will be informed of both process and content, so they can encourage members of the community to participate in the most appropriate way. This appropriate participation may be giving feedback to members of the DWG, or participating in engagement activities.

Support from the organisation will include participation in the PSG by the Mayor, General Manager and Director Corporate Services, and key staff involved in the conversations with the DWG.

At every DWG at the least the Executive, Group Manager Finance, and Group Manager Corporate and Economic Development must participate. Other staff will be called upon to participate depending on the meeting topics, including Assets and Forward Planning, Urban Planning, and staff involved in the delivery of various services.

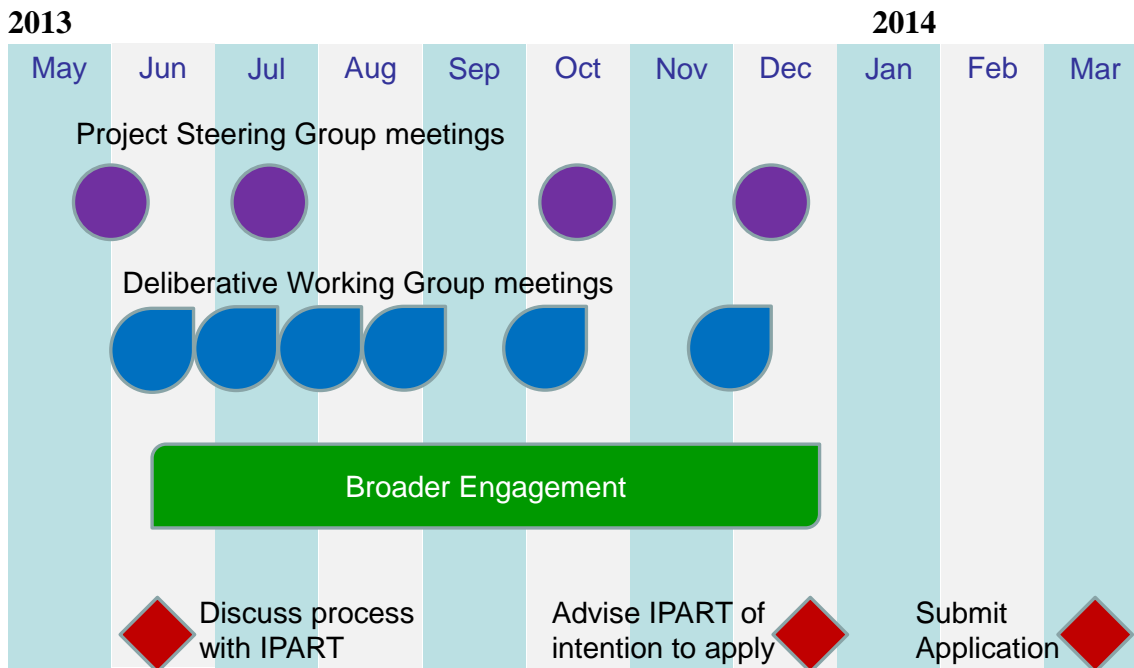
Timing

An application must be submitted to IPART by the end of March 2014. Advice to IPART of the intention to submit the application is to be provided by December 2013.

Engagement activities must take place over the period May – December 2013. In particular information must be ready to be included in rates notices by the end of June 2013.

The timetable is outlined schematically below.

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Specialist advice

The services of a suitably qualified consultant will be sought to provide specialist advice and support in undertaking the engagement program. Budget for this has been provided in the Corporate Strategy Business Unit. It is expected however that the majority of the activities of the Project Steering Group, Deliberative Working Group, and broader engagement program will be able to be supported and resourced by council staff.

Progress reports

Councillors will be kept informed about progress of the community engagement program with regular reports on both process and content.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the program of community engagement for an application to IPART for Special Rate Variations be endorsed.

**COUNCIL MEETING
RESOLUTION - 23 MAY 2013**

**5 SPECIAL RATE VARIATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM
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Min. No. 163 RESOLVED (Councillors Hawatt/Vasiliades)

THAT

1. The program of community engagement for an application to IPART for Special Rate Variations be endorsed and that capacity to pay be taken into consideration.
2. Council notes the increasing cost of living pressures faced by our residents, particularly the pensioners and acknowledges that many pensioners are already

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- struggling to make ends meet.
3. Council also notes that the current IPART Guidelines state that the Council's IP and R process should also establish that proposed rate increases are affordable having regard for the local community's capacity to pay.

During discussion of the above item, the following **ADDENDUM** was proposed.

ADDENDUM (Councillors Adler/Paschalidis-Chilas)

1. Council notes the increasing cost of living pressures faced by our residents, particularly the pensioners and acknowledges that many pensioners are already struggling to make ends meet.
2. Council also notes that the current IPART Guidelines state that the Council's IP and P process should also establish that proposed rate increases are affordable having regard for the local community's capacity to pay.
3. Council resolves that pensioners be exempt from any rate increase outside of rate pegging that may be prepared by the Special Rate Variation process.

The Chairperson ruled Part 3 of the **ADDENDUM** to be Out of Order.

Parts 1 and 2 of the **ADDENDUM** were accepted by the mover and seconder of the original motion.