

Briefing Note – 2013 Rates and Services Review Engagement Program

Introduction

Despite working hard to manage our expenses and maximise revenue in recent years, council has now acknowledged that it has insufficient revenues to continue to deliver the diverse range and current level of services it currently does. As a result options for changes in the range and levels of service, and increases in the property rate over and above the rate cap, are necessary. It is considered that under the current circumstances changes just in service levels or just increases in the property rate will not be sufficient – a mix of both is required.

Council has endorsed a proposal to apply to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (SRV) in early 2014 ready to commence in the 2014-15 financial year. The details of this application have not yet been determined. To be successful in our application we must undertake program of engagement to involve our community in determining the range and level of services, and the level and timing of Special Rate Variations they are willing to support.

Purpose of the engagement program

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

- appropriate levels of service for our services and infrastructure;
- whether or not some services should continue to be provided, and if not, which ones should cease;
- the size and timing of the special rate.

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 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 Canterbury community. It is with this group that the conversations about the challenges facing council, and the ways in which they could be resolved are 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 Canterbury City. 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.

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. The Mayor will play an important role in the functioning of the PSG.

Support from the organisation will include participation in the PSG by the 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 on the following page.

2013

2014

