



## 2013 Rates and Services Review Engagement Program Update for the Project Steering Group - October 2013

### **Introduction**

This report provides a brief update on progress since August 2013 of the 2013 Rates and Services Review Engagement Program.

### **Community Working Group**

#### **Meeting Dates**

The date for the submission of applications for Special Rate Variations has now been set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. This date is 24 February 2014, which is one month earlier than originally anticipated. This means there is a need to complete the Rates and Services Review earlier than originally planned, and to bring forward the dates for the next two Community Working Group meetings. The group agreed to the following new dates:

- Meeting 5 – **23 October** instead of 13 November
- Meeting 6 – **7 November** instead of 26 November.

The Community Working Group has also been invited to attend and present the results of their work to councillors at a workshop on the 13 November. Details of this workshop are yet to be confirmed.

#### **Representation**

Gaps in the demographic profile of the group have been filled (representation from East Ward, and the 40-49 age group), but there is still a gap in renters. Ways to fill this gap without recruiting new members (as it is considered too late to do this, new members would not have the necessary background from attending meetings to date) were discussed.

Several group members volunteered to seek views from people who are renters that they know. Specific questions for feedback have been distributed to Community Working Group members and are to be returned by Meeting 5.

#### **Demographic Profile**

After review of the Demographic Profile, it suggested that an additional attribute of the profile be included – that of disability. At Meeting 4 group members were asked to answer the following question (anonymously):

“Do you have a disability, chronic medical condition, or mental conditions which impact on the quality of your daily life? (YES / NO)”

The responses have been included in an updated Demographic Profile.

**Meeting 3**

The third meeting was held on 11 September and attended by sixteen people. One new member attended, invited to supplement the eastern area of the City. At this meeting the shared definition of the challenge facing council was amended to:

*How can council maintain the services needed to improve the high quality of life in Canterbury, keep costs down and find alternative sources of income so that rates can be kept as low as possible, and clearly demonstrate the need for any increase in rates?*

The group then reviewed council service profiles, and brainstormed possible strategies to solve this challenge. As there are a large number of ideas, they are included in the meeting outputs document which has been provided separately. The most mentioned ideas are listed in Table 1 (note that the feasibility of these has not yet been assessed). Council is now conducting a basic feasibility assessment of these strategies in preparation for Meeting 5, where options will be developed and assessed.

**Meeting 4**

The fourth meeting was held on 9 October and like Meeting 2 was attended by only twelve people, despite several reminder emails and phone calls to all group members.

At this meeting the group discussed the future they wanted for the City of Canterbury, and the services needed to achieve this desired future, and then developed a list of key features of, or criteria for, a good solution to the challenge facing council. These features, listed in the box below, form the criteria to be used to assess options generated at Meeting 5.

**A good solution is one that:**

- Includes increased user pays as well as rate increases;
- Includes reductions to services as well as rate increases;
- Includes achieving efficiencies in council operations as well as rate increases;
- Maintains those services that most contribute to achieving the desired future;
- Ensures council can continue to meet its legislative obligations;
- Involves the community more through increased partnerships;
- Does not require council to spend more;
- Limits rate increases to just that required to meet the need;
- Is able to demonstrate value for money;
- Is equitable, ensuring that no specific group is disadvantaged;
- Can be measured to demonstrate efficiency;
- Is well publicised to and easily understood by the wider community.

**Table 1:** Community Working Group's Ideas to solve the challenge

| <b>Service Area</b>                    | <b>Most Mentioned Idea</b>   |
|--|--|
| Roads and Footpaths                    | Charge fees for parking on streets, especially in main streets, and in council car parks (free for a suitable time, charge thereafter).  |
| Children's Services                    | Review user fees to compare and make sure they are similar to other private centres in the LGA. Increase the fee structure to break even. The services shouldn't be subsidised by rates.   |
| Environmental Protection               | Promote environmental outcomes, and support local environmental volunteer groups (will save council in the long run) eg. increase community volunteers to reduce street litter   |
| Urban Planning and Development Control | Charge more for development assessment, increase DA fees.  |
| Parks and Sporting Facilities          | Increase contributions from sporting clubs to cover the cost of operations and maintenance of the fields.  |
| Community Centres and Programs         | Review charges for hall hire   |
| Waste and Recycling Collection         | Halve the free pre-booked clean up collections (1 per year instead of 2)   |
| Economic and Town Centres Development  | Lease or licence spaces along the Cooks River where people can spend money on food and drink, such as cafes bars and restaurants, and earn an income from this, eg. Tasker Park. Along with this investigate ways to increase the use of River during weekdays (it is already quite busy on weekends). To make it an attraction, it will need more investment across the whole catchment – can we learn from Parramatta. |
| Cultural Events and Programs           | Attract larger events with a higher profile to attract more sponsorship, and result in less cost to council eg. Bangladeshi New Year (Olympic Park).   |
| Community Health and Safety            | Install more energy efficient street lighting eg. LED – it has a high upfront cost but can save money in the long run.   |
| Aquatic Centres                        | Close pools during quieter periods such as winter, staggering the closures, and closing outdoor pools leaving the indoor pools open.   |
| Civic Leadership and Governance        | Increase internal audits to find efficiencies.   |
| Libraries                              | Seek donation of private collections to libraries, especially CALD resources   |
| Community information and Engagement   | Provide more information via the website to reduce customer telephone enquiries and visits, arrange the information so it is easier to find, make it more interactive, targeted at customer needs, using navigation pathways, and add a question and answer guide to the home page.  |
| Street cleaning and maintenance        | Increase fine income through increased policing of dumped rubbish, eg. CCTV cameras at dumped rubbish hot spots to catch and fine dumpers  |
| Council Operations                     | Pay staff fortnightly or monthly, and use electronic payslips  |

**Future meetings**

Future meetings of the Community Working Group have been scheduled as follows:

| Meeting | Date                          | Content  |
|---------|-------------------------------|--|
| 5       | Wednesday<br>23 October 2013  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop specific options that might provide a solution to the issue.</li> <li>• Evaluate these options (assess them against the criteria developed during Meeting 4)</li> </ul> |
| 6       | Thursday<br>7 November        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree on the preferred option</li> <li>• Develop the detail of the preferred option</li> </ul>  |
| 7       | Wednesday<br>11 December 2013 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present the recommendations of the DWG to Council.</li> <li>• Celebrate completion of DWG's work</li> </ul>   |

**Engagement of the Broader Community**

We continue to invite contributions to the Rates and Services Review via the website:

<http://haveyoursaycanterbury.com.au>

Posters, flyers and feedback forms have also been distributed to Libraries, Childrens Centres, Senior Citizens Centres and to our community networks. Language assistance is also available via our Customer Service Centre for those who need it.

We are also continuing with other broader community engagement activities, including using our enewsletter, council column, social media such as facebook and twitter feed, council app, and posters and flyers distributed across the city to promote this website and invite people to participate in the review. Advertisements have also been placed in local English and other language newspapers.

We are planning face to face engagement including visits and presentations to community groups eg. parents and friends, chambers of commerce, and others that are conducted in council community centres; and a series of community forums around Canterbury in November / December.

**Project Steering Group**

Future Project Steering Group meetings have been scheduled as follows:

| Meeting | Date        | Objectives                          |
|---------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4       | 11 December | Review progress after DWG Meeting 6 |