

Community Engagement Plan Special Variation 2023



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1. PURPOSE

Council is committed to providing the community with accurate and timely information about Council activities, opportunities and initiatives that may impact or interest them.


The purpose of this community engagement is to ensure that the community is adequately informed and consulted about the impact of the proposed special variation and the impact of not applying for a special variation.

The objectives of this community engagement process include:

- To present the proposed SV.
- To identify the impact of the SV on the average rates across each rating category.
- To exhibit an updated LTFP demonstrating the impact of the proposed SV on Council's operating results from 2023-24 for feedback and final endorsement by Council.
- To communicate to the community the timeline and process for any potential SV application.
- To gather and consider the community's feedback to inform Council's final decision on whether and how to move forward with an SV application.

2. APPROACH

Council will utilise a three-phase approach to inform, consult, and conduct a public exhibition period, concerning the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum below as listed in Council's Community Engagement Policy.

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.

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To meet the assessment criteria for an SV application, Council must:

- Demonstrate that the need and purpose of a different rate path for Council's General Fund is clearly articulated and identified in Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) documents.
- Show evidence that the community is aware of the need for and the extent of a rate rise.
- Show that the impact on affected ratepayers is reasonable.
- Exhibit, approve and adopt the relevant IP&R documents.
- Explain and quantify the productivity improvements and cost containment strategies in its IP&R documents and/or application.
- Address any other matter that IPART considers relevant.

To meet criterion two, Council would only need to undertake engagement at the "inform" level, but a "consult" level would ensure it more fully meets criteria one and four.

2.1 Phase 1 – Create community awareness and provide information.

Council will release information through various communication channels:

- Advising that Council plans to apply for an SV.
- Explaining why Council proposes to apply for an SV.
- Providing details about what the SV is, and
- Providing an overview of the process, which includes a detailed proposal and consultation process with an accompanying timeline.

The process began with a report to the August 2022 Council meeting Revised Rating Methodologies and associated resolution 22/199. This was followed by announcements at 2023 Listening Posts information sessions held at Narrandera (Facebook live streamed), Barellan, Grong Grong and Sandigo.

2.2 Phase 2 – Consultation

The consultation phase will provide various avenues and opportunities for the public to provide their opinions and feedback on the SV proposal options and Council's existing service level regarding satisfaction versus expectation.

It will also provide multiple opportunities for the public to:

- Directly engage with Council on these matters
- Better understand Council's current financial position and existing service level ability, compared to the future feasibility of maintaining service levels should there be no application for an SV.

2.3 Phase 3 – Public Exhibition

This will consist of a comprehensive proposal detailing financial scenarios and the impacts on Council services and programs. It will include drafts of key documents, including the Revised Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan, fees, Long Term Financial Plan, Workforce Management Strategy, and revised Asset Management Strategy.

Council prepared a revised Asset Management Strategy with consultants Morrison Low which was presented to the April 2023 Council meeting, before being publicly exhibited between 19 April-17 May 2023. The Revised Asset Management Strategy was adopted at the September 2023 Council meeting.

3. KEY AUDIENCE

Stakeholder groups	Issues they will be concerned about
Residents of towns and villages, including Barellan, Binya, Grong Grong, Narrandera, and all rural localities and districts	Affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback.
Ratepayers	Affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback.
Councillors	Impact on the community, budget and financial planning, consultation and community engagement, transparency and accountability, alternatives.
Council staff	Managing workload, maintaining community trust, addressing political pressure, and communicating with the community.
Youth Advisory Councillors	Education and awareness, affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback, communication barriers.
Wiradjuri Elders and the local Aboriginal community	Affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback, respect for cultural heritage, inclusion, and participation.
Senior Citizens	Affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback, communication barriers.
Community Organisations	Increased operating costs, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback.
Kurrajong Clients	Affordability, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and

	opportunity to formally provide feedback, communication barriers.
Narrandera Business Group	Increased operating costs, transparency and accountability, impact on services, alternatives, community engagement and opportunity to formally provide feedback.
Media	Balancing unbiased reporting, ensuring transparency, and raising public awareness.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEDULE – 19 SEPTEMBER 2023 TO 3 NOVEMBER 2023

5. ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Council will employ a range of engagement methods and many communication channels to ensure that target audiences are aware of the details of the proposed SV application and how they can have their say on the matter.

- Community information sessions at Narrandera, Barellan, Grong Grong and Sandigo, including live streaming at the Narrandera session.
- Dedicated webpage on the Council website, easily accessible with current and relevant content.
- Newsletter distributed monthly as a digital edition, local newspaper edition, and A4 double-sided flyer to all residences.
- Media releases.
- Newspaper advertisements.
- Social media content.
- Radio segments with the Mayor and General Manager through local community radio station Spirit FM.
- Radio interviews with regional stations.
- Meetings with listed community stakeholder groups.
- Video content.
- Fact sheets.
- Direct correspondence.
- Council reports.
- Online survey.

This community engagement will build from inform to consult:

- Inform: to raise awareness and inform all stakeholder groups of the options being considered.

- Consult: to seek considered community feedback on these options to inform Council in their final deliberations on a potential SV application.

The proposed mechanisms to be used for this engagement are outlined in the table below.

Mechanism	Level of consultation	Reach (stakeholder groups)
Direct mail-out	Inform	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Newspaper and television advertisements	Inform	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
e-Newsletters	Inform	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Video content	Inform	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Social media channels	Inform	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Have your Say page on the website	Inform & consult	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Community public forums	Inform & consult	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Consultative committees and working group meetings	Inform & consult	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients, Narrandera Business Group, Media
Drop-in sessions	Inform & consult	Residents, Ratepayers, Councillors, Council Staff, Youth Councillors, Wiradjuri Elders and local Aboriginal Community, Senior Citizens, Community Organisations, Kurrajong clients,

Mechanism	Level of consultation	Reach (stakeholder groups)
		Narrandera Business Group, Media

These external community engagement mechanisms will be coupled with internal communications to inform all staff about the proposed SV and process and provide them with information to direct questions from members of the public that may arise in their day-to-day interactions. This will include:

- A managers' briefing.
- Information and scripting for customer service and frontline teams.
- Updates in staff e-news.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The roles of councillors, Council officers and Morrison Low in the engagement process are defined in the table below.

Role	Responsibility
Morrison Low (consultant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the background paper on the SV. • Update the Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) and Delivery Program (DP) for exhibition
Narrandera communications and engagement team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop collateral for the various written mechanisms, based on information provided by Morrison Low to inform Council communications. • Facilitate public forums, assist the Council in preparing presentations and taking notes at each forum. • Publish and release materials in line with this community engagement action plan, including internal communications. • Gather community feedback and prepare a report on community engagement outcomes
Narrandera DCS and finance team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the exhibition process and finalisation of the updated 2023/24 LTFP and DP (which includes the SV)
Narrandera executive and management team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief staff on SV, process, and community engagement activities • Attend public forums, where required.
Narrandera councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve community engagement plan
Narrandera General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a community engagement plan, and approve any adjustments to the community engagement process as required. • Participate in media interviews and public forums, where required

7. DETAILED ACTION PLAN

Ref	Action	Responsible	By when	Dependency
1	Draft Background Paper for SV	Morrison Low (consultant)	19 Sept	
2	Finalise updated LTFP for exhibition	Morrison Low (consultant)	19 Sept	
2	Develop FAQs	Communications & Engagement team	31 Aug	1,2
4	Draft 'Direct Mail' content	Communications & Engagement team	31 Aug	1,2
5	Draft (and translate, where applicable) Newspaper advertisements	Communications & Engagement team	8 Sept	1,2
6	Draft e-Newsletter content	Communications & Engagement team	29 Sept	1,2
7	Develop advertisements	Communications & Engagement team	8 Sept	1,2
8	Develop survey	Communications & Engagement team and	1 Oct	1,2
9	Build 'Have Your Say' page	Communications & Engagement team	19 Sept	1,2
10	Schedule public forums	Communications & Engagement team	24 Aug	
11	Develop media releases and social media content for the commencement of engagement	Communications & Engagement team	19 Sep	1,2
12	Develop and distribute information and scripting for customer service and frontline staff	Communications & Engagement team	8 Sept	1,2
13	Council resolves to proceed to community consultation on an SV	Council	19 Sept	1,2
14	Brief managers on Council decisions and next steps	General Manager / Directors	19 Sept	14

Ref	Action	Responsible	By when	Dependency
15	Publish first newspaper advertisement on SV	Communications & Engagement team	28 Sept	5,14
16	Open the 'Have Your Say' page and Survey to the community	Communications & Engagement team	19 Sept	9,14
17	Engagement period commences		19 Sept	14
18	Publish e-Newsletter	Communications & Engagement team	5 Oct	6,17
19	Release direct mail out	Communications & Engagement team	2-6 Oct	4,17
20	Manage social media	Communications & Engagement team	19 Sept – 3 Nov	11,17
21	Manage media enquires	Communications & Engagement team	19 Sept – 3 Nov	11,17
22	Conduct public and roadshow forums	Communications & Engagement team	27 Sept 10 Oct 11 Oct 12 Oct 18 Oct	10,17
23	Publish a second newspaper advertisement	Communications & Engagement team	5 Oct	5,17
24	Release reminder of SV community engagement closing on 8 November: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media 	Communications & Engagement team	26 Sept	6,11,17
25	Close engagement, exhibition of updated LTFP and survey, and gathering all community feedback	Communications & Engagement team	3 Nov	17
26	Analyse submissions and survey results and draft a community engagement report	Communications & Engagement team	20 Nov	25

Ref	Action	Responsible	By when	Dependency
27	Finalise updated LTFP based on feedback over the exhibition period	Finance team	20 Nov	25
28	Draft report to Council	General Manager	20 Nov	25
29	Council resolves on whether to proceed with the SV application	Council	28 Nov	28
30	Council notifies IPART of intent to apply for SV (date tentative, TBC by IPART)	General Manager	1 Dec	29

8. EXPECTED ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

These methods will aid in the statistical and qualitative data analysis of the community opinion on the proposed SV options and community understanding of the level of investment required for service levels.

The community feedback will allow the Council to make informed decisions and, where necessary, amendments to the SV proposal, Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan and Resourcing Strategy as part of the Council's submission to the IPART.

9. KEY MESSAGES

It is important to communicate to the community those aspects that are negotiable and those that are not. Council has identified two non-negotiable aspects:

- The legislative requirement to adhere to sound financial management principles, and
- Addressing the current core deficits in the Council's base case scenario.

To ensure the community's opinion is considered, their feedback is sought on the level of SV required to ensure financial sustainability. Community engagement activities, and a background paper outlining the need for and financial impact of the SV, will be presented to facilitate communication.

Key messages in all community communications and collateral will include how members can gain additional information or have their questions answered, how to provide feedback regarding the proposed SV increase, and what to expect once the community engagement activities have been completed, including the IPART's public submission and assessment process.

10. OTHER KEY POINTS

To ensure the community is well-informed, the materials provided will have quality content, clarity, and timely delivery.

Key information to be included:

- Definition of an SV.
- Explanation of why an SV is under consideration.
- Explanation that the proposed SV is a permanent rate increase that will be maintained in the rating base.
- Explanation of what the additional income from the proposed SV will fund.
- Sufficient opportunity for ratepayers to gain an understanding of the proposal.
- Simplified presentation of information with clear and concise messaging.
- Easily accessible and informative material.

- Use of charts, tables, and explanatory text to make financial calculations easy to understand.
- Average annual rate increases, and total rate increases in dollars for residential, business, and farmland ratepayers.
- Actions by the Council to become more financially sustainable.
- Review options available for consideration.
- Overview of how ratepayers can provide feedback and participate in the process.

The goal of the communication plan is to provide clear, concise, and accessible information for the community, inviting them to actively participate in the decision-making process.

11. ENGAGEMENT REPORTING

To provide a comprehensive record of the community engagement process and ensure maximum participation, a final report will be generated. It will detail the planning, activities, outcomes, and extent of community engagement with all relevant stakeholder groups.

To gauge the level of participation in the engagement process, the following measures will be applied:

- Number of SV-related inquiries processed by customer service staff.
- Attendance records for public forums.
- Number of submissions received on the SV proposal.
- Number of unique survey responses.
- Click-through rate for the engagement site pages.

Where possible, demographic information will be collected from participants to ensure representation of the Shire community and that all relevant groups have been engaged, including those often harder to reach.

The aim is to obtain accurate data that assesses the level of community engagement, to provide a complete understanding of stakeholder participation in the SV decision-making process.

12. REPORT TO COUNCIL

Included in the report to Council are the results of community engagement, presented scenarios to be deliberated by the Council, as well as the determination whether to proceed in formally submitting an SV application to the IPART.

13. MONITOR RISK

Council’s communication and engagement team will monitor the level of engagement during the consultation process. Council’s General Manager must approve any proposed alterations to the plan before implementation.

This table contains the primary risks associated with community engagement, and the risk ratings reflect the residual risk after executing the documented risk responses.

Risk	Risk Response	Residual Likelihood	Residual Consequences	Residual Risk Rating
Engagement doesn’t meet IPART assessment Criteria	Engagement plan and activities. Analyse and integrate requirement to meet criteria.	Low	Medium	Low
Impact on ratepayers of raising rates at a time of increasing inflation and cost of living pressures	Clearly quantifying the impact of the SRV on average rates across all categories.	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Outlining measures taken to find efficiencies and cost savings within council operations before considering the SRV	Medium	Medium	Medium