



Date: Tuesday, 9 September 2025
Time: 3.00pm
Location: Loddon Shire Council Chambers, Wedderburn

MINUTES

Special Council Meeting

**MINUTES OF LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT THE LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEDDERBURN
ON TUESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 3.00PM**

PRESENT: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor), Cr Nick Angelo, Cr David Weaver and Cr Miki Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Lincoln Fitzgerald (Chief Executive Officer), Wendy Gladman (Director Community Wellbeing), Michelle Stedman (Director Corporate), Steve Van Orsouw (Director Operations) and Lisa Clue (Manager Governance)

1 OPENING AFFIRMATION

The Mayor read the Opening Affirmation

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Chief Executive Officer read the Acknowledgement of Country

3 APOLOGIES

RESOLUTION 2025/145

Moved: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor)

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That the apology received from Cr Holt be accepted and leave of absence granted.

CARRIED

4 DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

5 DECISION REPORTS

5.1 DRAFT COMMUNITY VISION 2035 AND COUNCIL PLAN 2025-2029 - SEEKING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

File Number:

Author: Renae Colls, Executive Assistant

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: 1. Draft Community Vision 2035 and Council Plan 2025-2029

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. seek feedback from the community regarding the Draft Community Vision 2035 and Draft Council Plan 2025 – 2029 *incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*; and,
2. receive feedback from the community with a closing date of 30 September 2025.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Workshops to develop the Draft Community Vision 2035 and Council Plan 2025-2029 (Draft Council Plan) have been undertaken in sessions conducted April, June and August 2025.

BACKGROUND

Loddon Shire Council (Council) is required to review its Community Vision and prepare and adopt both a four-year Council Plan and a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP).

These strategic documents are mandated under the *Local Government Act 2020 (LGA 2020)* and *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (PHWA 2008)* and must be adopted by Council no later than 31 October in the year following a general election.

Once adopted, the new documents will supersede the current Community Vision 2031, Council Plan 2021-2025 and the MPHWP 2021-2025.

Community Vision

Council has prepared a Draft Community Vision 2035 in accordance with section 89 of the *LGA 2020*. The Community Vision must look ahead for at least 10 financial years and describe the community's aspirations for the future of the municipality.

The development of the Draft Community Vision 2035 builds on the outcomes of The Loddon Project (2021), which informed the Community Vision 2031 and Council Plan 2021-2025.

Council Plan - Incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

Council has developed a Draft Council Plan in accordance with section 90 of the *LGA 2020*. The Draft Council Plan was developed in response to the Draft Community Vision 2035, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing Loddon Shire Council.

Council has developed the Draft Council Plan which sets out the strategic direction for the organisation and what Council seeks to achieve over the four-year council term to work towards the Community Vision 2035.

For the first time, the MPHWP has been incorporated into the Draft Council Plan in accordance with section 27 of the *PHWA 2008*. Council has submitted the Draft Council Plan and the required checklist to the Department of Health and is awaiting formal confirmation of an exemption from complying with section 26 of the *PHWA 2008*.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Through workshops with Councillors, the Community Reference Group and Council's Internal Working Group a revised Community Vision 2035 was developed: *"Thriving communities where everyone is welcome and all have the opportunity to live, work and create experiences."*

To deliver on this Community Vision, the Draft Council Plan outlines Council's strategic direction around five key themes:

- Thriving
- Welcome
- Live
- Work
- Experience

These themes reflect the priorities identified by the community in setting the Vision and provide the framework for Council's strategic objectives, strategies and strategic indicators for the next four financial years.

In accordance with the Gender Equality Act (2020), a Gender Impact Assessment is currently being undertaken and will be finalised to inform Council when considering adoption of the Council Plan 2025-2029.

COST/BENEFITS

Development of the Draft Council Plan has been undertaken internally using existing staff resources rather than through consultancy. This method of development will support staff engagement and knowledge of the plan to support delivery of Council's objectives.

Once adopted, delivery of the Council Plan will be supported through Council's Annual Budget process, with external funding support, by other aligned government agencies and in partnership with the community.

External graphic design services were engaged to support the development of the Draft Council Plan 2025-2029 and printing services. The cost of \$3,700 is within the existing budget allocation.

RISK ANALYSIS

There are risks involved if Council fails to develop the Council Plan in accordance with the legislated requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* and *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

There is also a reputational risk that the Draft Council Plan receives limited community feedback, leading to a Council Plan that does not align with community aspirations and needs. This risk has been mitigated by working with the community to re-establish the Community Vision and utilising that Vision as the framework for Council action. This will be further mitigated through the community engagement process that provides multiple avenues for community participation and feedback.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Development of the Draft Council Plan has been informed by a deliberative engagement process, including input from Councillors, Council's Internal Working Group, Community Reference Group (three nominated community members from each ward) and key stakeholders.

The deliberative engagement component addresses Council's obligations under the *LGA 2020* and Council's Community Engagement Policy and has informed the development of the Draft Council Plan.

The purpose of this report is to seek Council authorisation to place the Draft Council Plan on public display for community feedback. If endorsed, it is proposed the feedback period run until 30 September 2025.

During this period, community members are invited to provide feedback via Council's engagement platform Connect@Loddon or by emailing executive@loddon.vic.gov.au. Advertisements will be displayed via print and social media encouraging community participation.

Following the feedback period, all submissions will be reviewed and considered in preparation of the final Council Plan 2025-2029, which is scheduled to be presented to Council for adoption at the October Council Meeting.

RESOLUTION 2025/146

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council:

1. seek feedback from the community regarding the Draft Community Vision 2035 and Draft Council Plan 2025 – 2029 *incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*; and,
2. receive feedback from the community with a closing date of 30 September 2025.

CARRIED

5.2 DRAFT FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 - 2034/35 - SEEKING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**File Number:****Author:** Ange Marshall, Acting Manager Financial Services**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** 1. Draft Financial Plan 2025/26 - 2034/35 for Community Feedback**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council seek feedback from the community regarding the Draft Financial Plan 2025/26 – 2034/35 with the feedback period concluding on 30 September 2025.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council last adopted a Financial Plan on 28 June 2022. The Draft Financial Plan 2025/26 was previously discussed by Councillors at the Council Forum on 8 July 2025.

BACKGROUND

The financials for the current Financial Plan document (2022/23 – 2031/32) were developed as part of an initial service delivery project undertaken by CT Management. Since the adoption of the previous Plan, Council have developed in-house financials for future periods using internal systems and resources.

Council have also continued to review the strategic actions outlined in the document and report on these within each subsequent years' Annual Budget publication.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Section 91 of the *Local Government Act 2020* states:

1. *A Council must develop, adopt and keep in force a Financial Plan in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.*
2. *The scope of a Financial Plan is a period of at least the next 10 financial years.*
3. *A Financial Plan must include the following in the manner and form prescribed by the regulations—*
 - a) *statements describing the financial resources required to give effect to the Council Plan and other strategic plans of the Council;*
 - b) *information about the decisions and assumptions that underpin the forecasts in the statements specified in paragraph (a);*
 - c) *statements describing any other resource requirements that the Council considers appropriate to include in the Financial Plan;*
 - d) *any other matters prescribed by the regulations.*
4. *Council must develop or review the Financial Plan in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices and adopt the Financial Plan by 31 October in the year following a general election.*

In addition to satisfying the legislative requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*, the draft 10-Year Financial Plan (the Plan) has been developed to provide Council with a framework for moving towards long-term financial sustainability and to support delivery of the Community Vision and Council Plan.

The Plan identifies a number of significant challenges, most notably that operating expenses are currently projected to grow at a higher rate than income, leading to an average annual operating deficit of approximately \$5.5 million and a cumulative deficit of \$55 million over the life of the Plan.

Without intervention, the Plan currently shows Council's cash reserves declining from \$35.6 million to \$3.15 million, which is not sustainable.

The Capital Works Statement also highlights an accruing renewal gap even with investment of an average of \$10 million per annum into Council's asset base, meaning Council is currently unable to fully fund the replacement of ageing assets.

These projections underscore the need for a change from 'business as usual'. Council will need to consider measures to increase revenue and/or reduce expenditure to restore financial sustainability. This includes reviewing how services are delivered, exploring efficiencies, and prioritising asset renewal.

Given the challenging outlook, Council will be asked in the near future to consider adopting a Plan with the understanding that a further refresh will occur in 12 months, supported by early work on Strategic Actions to improve forecasts, refine assumptions, and set a clearer pathway toward long-term financial sustainability.

Releasing the draft Plan for consultation will allow the community to provide feedback on those financial challenges, the potential responses, and the choices Council must make to ensure long-term sustainability.

COST/BENEFITS

Costs associated with developing the Plan and other financial documents are captured in existing operational budgets.

The benefits to Council and the community of developing a Financial Plan include building informed decision making around the long-term sustainability of Council's assets and operations. Transparent planning such as that included in the Plan builds community and stakeholder confidence around areas such as service continuity and funding readiness. The Plan will also assist the organisation to improve operational efficiency and identify savings which may allow resources to be used more effectively for the benefit of the community.

A consultative and timely process also contributes to regulatory compliance in line with the *Local Government Act 2020*, and allows the community to provide feedback to Council on the content of the document.

RISK ANALYSIS

There are many risks associated with financial sustainability that the Plan looks to assist the organisation and Council in addressing. There is a risk that Council expenditure will exceed budget at a point in time or that Council does not have enough cash to deliver the required services in the future, however, this risk is minimised through a range of monitoring and reporting activities as well as delivery of the strategic actions as proposed in the Plan.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In the drafting of the initial Plan assumptions, actions and financials, consultation has been undertaken with key internal stakeholders including leadership teams and the organisation's Management Executive Group. Presentations to Council and Council's Audit and Risk Committee for discussion were also held in July 2025.

In this report Council is considering the release of the Draft Financial Plan for consultation with the community ahead of considering adoption of the Plan at its October 2025 Council Meeting.

RESOLUTION 2025/147

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council seek feedback from the community regarding the Draft Financial Plan 2025/26 – 2034/35 with the feedback period concluding on 30 September 2025.

CARRIED

NEXT MEETING

The next Ordinary Meeting of Council will be held on 23 September 2025 at Wedderburn commencing at 3.00pm.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 3.13 pm.

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CHAIRPERSON