



Date: Tuesday, 24 March 2026
Time: 3.00pm
Location: Loddon Shire Council Chambers, Wedderburn

MINUTES

Council Meeting

**MINUTES OF LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT THE LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEDDERBURN
ON TUESDAY, 24 MARCH 2026 AT 3.00PM**

PRESENT: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor), Cr Nick Angelo, Cr Gavan Holt and Cr David Weaver

IN ATTENDANCE: Lincoln Fitzgerald (Chief Executive Officer), Wendy Gladman (Director Community Wellbeing), Michelle Stedman (Director Corporate), David Southcombe (Acting 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 AND LEAVE OF ABSENCE

The Mayor noted Cr Wilson has been granted a Leave of Absence by Council to 27 April 2026.

4 DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

5 PREVIOUS MINUTES**5.1 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES****File Number:** FOL/19/45615**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 24 February 2026
2. Council Meeting of 24 February 2026
3. Council Forum of 10 March 2026

REPORT

This report seeks Council confirmation of Minutes from the February 2026 Council Briefing and Council Meeting, and the March 2026 Council Forum as previously circulated to Councillors.

RESOLUTION 2026/28**Moved:** Cr David Weaver**Seconded:** Cr Nick Angelo

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 24 February 2026
2. Council Meeting of 24 February 2026
3. Council Forum of 10 March 2026.

CARRIED

6 COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

6.1 RECORD OF COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

File Number: 02/01/001

Author: Lisa Clue, Manager Governance

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 24 February 2026
2. Council Forum held 10 March 2026

Rule 35 of Council's Governance Rules requires a record of meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to be presented to the next available scheduled Council meeting for confirmation that must include:

- a) a record of which Councillors and officers attended the meeting;
- b) a summary of the matters considered in the meeting; and
- c) a record of any conflicts of interest disclosed by Councillors and officers and any Councillors or officers that left the meeting whilst a matter that their conflict of interest related to was being discussed.

Section 3 of the Governance Rules defines meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to mean a meeting of the kind described in section 131(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 and includes a meeting which:

- a) is schedule or planned for the purpose of discussing the business of Council or briefing Councillors;
- b) is attended by a majority of Councillors;
- c) is attended by at least one member of Council staff; and
- d) is not a Council meeting or delegated committee meeting.

This report seeks confirmation of the following auspiced meetings:

Meeting details	Council Briefing
Date	24 February 2026
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Weaver Cr Wilson
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer David Stretch, Acting Director Community Wellbeing Steve Van Orsouw, Director Operations Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate Tracy Hunt, Governance Coordinator Glen Harvey, Manager Development and Compliance and Louise Johnston, Statutory Planning Coordinator – Items 2 and 3 below
Item(s) discussed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of Council Meeting Agenda 2. PA 6094 – Use and development of the land for a dwelling and associated outbuildings at Harpers Lane, Wedderburn 3. PA 6107 Planning Application for the subdivision of the land into two lots at 20 Kiniry Street, Boort 4. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecommunication Outages • Review of Audit and Risk Committee Charter • Tarnagulla and Inglewood Wards Tour • Wedderburn Ambulance • Urgent Business Motion(s)
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Nil
Councillor/officer left room	N/A

Meeting details	Council Forum
Date	10 March 2026
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Wilson
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer David Stretch, Acting Director Community Wellbeing Steve Van Orsouw, Director Operations Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate Lisa Clue, Manager Governance Daniel Lloyd, Manager Works – Item 3 below Matt Thomas and Kate Griffiths, the Reputation Company – Item 4 below Janine Jackson, Manager Organisation Development – Item 5 below David Southcombe, Manager Assets and Infrastructure and Tinu Scaria, Asset and GIS Officer – Item 6 below Natalie Martin, Manager Financial Services – Items 7 and 8 below Mark Williams and Caroline Welsh, GWM Water – Item 9 below
Item(s) discussed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draft 2026 State Election Priorities Workshop 2. Draft MAV State Council Motion – May 2026 3. Kerbside Waste Collection Service – Glass and FOGO 4. Loddon Shire Place Brand – Project Update 5. Draft Customer Service Charter 6. Draft Asset Naming Policy 7. Review of Council's Financial Reserves 8. Review of Budget Management and Principles Policy 9. Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Presentation 10. Review of Forward Council Agendas 11. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates from the Mayor • Updates from the Chief Executive Officer
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Nil
Councillor/officer left room	N/A

RESOLUTION 2026/29

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 24 February 2026
2. Council Forum held 10 March 2026

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

7 REVIEW OF ACTIONS**7.1 REVIEW OF ACTIONS****File Number:** 02/01/002**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** 1. Status of Council resolution actions**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

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.

REPORT

A document containing the status of actions associated with Council resolutions is attached to this Agenda report.

All five actions arising from the February Council meeting resolutions have been acted upon.

There was one outstanding action prior to the February 2026 Council meeting. This action, from the November 2025 Council meeting, relates to updating Council's 2024 Priorities document and has substantially commenced but is not yet complete.

RESOLUTION 2026/30**Moved:** Cr Gavan Holt**Seconded:** Cr David Weaver

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

CARRIED

8 MAYORAL REPORT**8.1 MAYORAL REPORT****File Number:** 02/01/001**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

REPORT

Mayor Straub presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Murray River Group of Councils	
5/3/2026 – Meeting - Echuca	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
08/03/2026	Wedderburn Detector Jamboree
10/03/2026	March Council Forum - Wedderburn

RESOLUTION 2026/31

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

CARRIED

9 COUNCILLORS' REPORT**9.1 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS**

File Number: 02/01/001

Author: Lisa Clue, Manager Governance

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

REPORT

Each Councillor presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Cr Weaver

Council activities	
Date	Activity
14/03/2026	Boort Probus Club (Guest Speaker)
01/03/2026	Boort Trotting and Pacing Cup Meeting

Cr Angelo

Council activities	
Date	Activity
25/02/2026	Newbridge Hall Committee Meeting
10/03/2026	March Council Forum - Wedderburn
21/03/2026	Eddington Sprints
22/03/2026	Orchid Book Launch – Rheola

Cr Holt

Municipal Association of Victoria	
12/03/2026 – Delegates Meeting	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
10/03/2026	March Council Forum - Wedderburn

RESOLUTION 2026/32

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

CARRIED

10 DECISION REPORTS

10.1 ADOPTION OF THE BUDGET MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPLES POLICY

File Number: FOL/19/432511

Author: Natalie Martin, Manager Financial Services

Authoriser: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate

Attachments: 1. Draft Budget Management and Principles Policy v1

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Budget Management and Principles Policy v1.

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

Councillors were briefed on the preparation of a draft Budget Management and Principles Policy v1 (the Policy) during a Budget Workshop in January 2026 and then were taken through the draft Policy at the March Council Forum. Councillor representatives at the Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) meeting also participated in discussion on the draft Policy at the 23 February 2026 ARC meeting. This report represents the first occasion the Policy is being formally considered by Council for adoption.

BACKGROUND

This report presents the draft Budget Management and Principles Policy, which establishes the overarching framework for the development, review and approval of Loddon Shire Council's annual budget, including the circumstances under which the budget may be formally revised.

The draft Policy has been reviewed by the ARC, which has endorsed it for consideration by Council. Subject to adoption, the Policy will inform the 2026/27 budget process and subsequent budget cycles.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The draft Policy has been developed to formalise the financial principles and governance standards that underpin Council's budget-setting and budget-review processes. Its introduction addresses the need for a clear, consistent framework to guide decision-making and ensure the annual budget is prepared, monitored, and revised in a manner that is robust, transparent, and compliant with statutory requirements.

The draft Policy reinforces the alignment of the annual budget with the Council Plan, the Financial Plan, and other supporting strategies, ensuring that budget decisions appropriately reflect adopted strategic priorities, emerging external influences, and new proposals as they arise.

By clearly articulating Council's approach to budget management and financial planning, the draft Policy strengthens governance oversight, promotes accountability, and supports informed decision-making. It also underpins Council's commitment to transparent financial reporting and the delivery of services that are financially sustainable over both the short and long term.

COST/BENEFITS

There are no direct financial costs associated with the development or implementation of the Policy, as it formalises existing budget-setting, monitoring, and review practices within Council.

The draft Policy strengthens governance and accountability by providing a clear and consistent framework for budget decision-making, enhances transparency and alignment with the Council Plan and Financial Plan, supports compliance with statutory requirements, and provides clearer guidance for officers and Council, thereby reducing the risk of inconsistent or ad-hoc budget decisions and supporting long-term financial sustainability.

RISK ANALYSIS

Without a clear and documented framework for budget management, there is a risk of inconsistent decision-making, reduced transparency, and misalignment with Council's strategic and long-term financial planning frameworks. The draft Policy mitigates these risks by establishing clear principles, governance arrangements, and budget review triggers, supporting statutory compliance, effective oversight, and financially sustainable decision-making.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The draft Policy was developed following consultation with the Management Executive Group to ensure alignment with Council's existing budget processes and governance expectations. Feedback informed the refinement of the draft Policy prior to progressing through the required internal review stages.

Councillors were initially introduced to the draft Policy during a Budget Workshop in January 2026 after which the draft Policy was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) on 23 February 2026. The ARC provided further feedback on the document being to strengthen recognition of Council's criteria-based assessments for capital investment into new, renewal, upgrade and expansion capital investment. This feedback was incorporated and the draft Policy was presented to Council Forum on 10 March 2026 and subsequently is being considered for adoption at the March 2026 Council Meeting.

RESOLUTION 2026/33

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council adopts the Budget Management and Principles Policy v1.

CARRIED

10.2 ADOPTION OF ASSET NAMING POLICY

File Number: FOL/19/432722
Author: Tinu Scaria, Assets and GIS Officer
Authoriser: David Southcombe, Acting Director Operations
Attachments: 1. Asset Naming Policy

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to adopt the reviewed Asset Naming Policy

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 adopted the Asset Naming Policy in July 2012. Since adoption, asset naming and renaming matters have continued to be managed in accordance with the policy and relevant legislative and guideline requirements. No formal review of the policy has been presented to Council since its adoption

BACKGROUND

The Asset Naming Policy provides guidance for the naming and renaming of assets for which Council is the coordinating or responsible authority. This includes, but is not limited to, roads, streets, open spaces, parks, bridges and other public features within the Loddon Shire.

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that asset naming is undertaken in a consistent, transparent and compliant manner that supports effective asset management, service delivery, emergency response, wayfinding and community identity.

Council's existing Asset Naming Policy was adopted in 2012. Since that time, legislative requirements and external guidelines relating to place naming have evolved, particularly those administered by Geographic Names Victoria (GNV) under the Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (the Act). The Naming rules for places in Victoria 2022 - Statutory requirements for naming roads, features and localities is the latest document to be followed from the state government as foundation for any place naming proposal. Councils are required to ensure that naming and renaming of roads and public places complies with the Act and associated GNV policies and guidelines.

GNV is the statutory authority responsible for maintaining Victoria's official register of place names and provides mandatory guidelines for the naming and renaming of roads, localities and geographic features. Compliance with these requirements is essential to ensure asset names are formally recognised, unique, culturally appropriate and suitable for use by emergency services and the broader community.

The review of the Asset Naming Policy was undertaken to ensure it remains current, aligns with GNV requirements, and reflects contemporary Council governance and asset management practices.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The review of the 2012 Asset Naming Policy confirmed that the core intent of the policy remains appropriate. However, updates were required to improve clarity and ensure alignment with current legislative and guideline requirements, particularly those administered by Geographic Names Victoria.

The reviewed Asset Naming Policy:

- reinforces Council's obligations under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* and *Naming rules for places in Victoria 2022*
- aligns asset naming and renaming processes with GNV policies and guidelines
- clarifies Council's role as the coordinating or responsible authority when submitting names to GNV for registration
- strengthens consistency across Council systems, public records and emergency service datasets
- provides clearer governance, consultation and approval pathways for naming and renaming decisions

The updated policy ensures that asset naming decisions are consistent, defensible and compliant, while maintaining continuity with Council's existing practices.

COST/BENEFITS

This policy does not have any direct financial impact on council

RISK ANALYSIS

There is no change in risk associated with the adoption of the new policy. It is a required update of an existing policy.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The policy has been reviewed with consideration of current Geographic Names Victoria guidelines and requirements.

RESOLUTION 2026/34

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council resolve to adopt the reviewed Asset Naming Policy.

CARRIED

10.3 REVIEW OF THE FINANCIAL RESERVES POLICY

File Number: FOL/19/432511
Author: Natalie Martin, Manager Financial Services
Authoriser: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate
Attachments: 1. Financial Reserves Policy (version 13)

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. adopts the Financial Reserves Policy (Version 13).
2. notes that the Financial Reserves Policy and associated reserve balances will continue to be reviewed annually through the Annual Budget and Financial Plan processes, to maintain relevance, transparency and alignment with Council's strategic and financial objectives.

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

Version 12 of the Financial Reserves Policy (the Policy) was adopted by Council in May 2025, with a corresponding action for the Policy to be reviewed as part of each Annual Budget process.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Policy is to detail how Council provides for and utilises funds into and out of each reserve.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Council's financial reserves are operated through the allocation of funds during the Annual Budget process and at other times by Council resolution where required. Council's active general reserves are established to fund specific future requirements. These reserves form part of Council's overall cash surplus and are managed through reserve accounting, enabling funds to be set aside in the current year for capital expenditure and other planned purchases in future years.

The review of Council's financial reserves has provided a comprehensive assessment of the purpose, adequacy and sustainability of existing reserves. Informed by Councillor input, internal audit advice and Audit and Risk Committee guidance, the review identified opportunities to rationalise, consolidate and, where appropriate, adjust reserves, with the objective of reducing unnecessary cash restrictions and improving alignment with Council priorities and long-term financial planning.

A robust review of the Policy has been undertaken and consistent with the above objective, it is proposed that eight reserves be closed (detailed below) and that a further one reserve being the Caravan Park Development has a maximum balance to \$800,000 applied at any one time. It is also proposed that the Gravel and Sand Pit Restoration reserve be renamed the Gravel and Sand Pit reserve. Details of the closed reserves are:

- Capital expenditure
- Fleet replacement
- Information technology
- Major projects
- Plant replacement

- Professional development
- Unfunded superannuation liability
- Unspent grants

Reserves proposed for closure will either be returned to accumulated surplus where they are no longer required, and/or provided for through Council's Financial Plan and Annual Budget. This approach will reduce unnecessary cash restrictions and support the funding of priority projects.

It is also proposed that the Policy, together with associated reserve balances, continue to be reviewed annually through the budgeting and Financial Plan processes to ensure ongoing relevance, transparency and alignment with Council's strategic and financial objectives.

COST/BENEFITS

The review and rationalisation of Council's financial reserves has no direct financial cost, as the work has been undertaken internally by Council officers with targeted support from internal auditors as part of business-as-usual activities. It delivers clear benefits by reducing unnecessarily restricted cash, improving financial flexibility, and enabling funds to be redirected to higher-priority projects and emerging needs.

Closing reserves that no longer serve a strategic purpose, formalising annual allocations, and applying caps where appropriate will strengthen alignment between reserve balances, forecast requirements and Council priorities; support more effective long-term financial planning through the annual budget and 10-year Financial Plan; and reinforce a robust governance framework for the efficient and transparent management of Council's cash and reserves.

RISK ANALYSIS

The Financial Reserves Policy clearly defines the purpose of each reserve and establishes the conditions governing movements into and out of reserves. The comprehensive review of Council's financial reserves, including detailed analysis of reserve balances, future funding requirements and long-term sustainability, mitigates the risk of inappropriate or inefficient use of restricted funds. Implementation of the recommendations arising from this review will reduce unnecessary cash constraints, improve alignment with Council priorities and financial planning, and continue to provide a robust governance framework for the management of financial reserves.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Councillor engagement formed a key component of the review of Council's financial reserves, with a workshop held on 15 January 2026 to support a detailed consideration of each reserve. Councillors provided preliminary feedback and requested further analysis where required, which informed subsequent work undertaken by Council officers and internal auditors.

Ahead of being returned to Council for review and then consideration of its adoption, the Audit and Risk Committee endorsed the proposed rationalisation of the Reserves in accordance with the Financial Reserves Policy.

RESOLUTION 2026/35

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That Council:

1. adopts the Financial Reserves Policy (Version 13).
2. notes that the Financial Reserves Policy and associated reserve balances will continue to be reviewed annually through the Annual Budget and Financial Plan processes, to maintain relevance, transparency and alignment with Council's strategic and financial objectives.

CARRIED

10.4 APPOINTMENT OF AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE CHAIR

File Number: FOL/20/612
Author: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate
Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer
Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council, on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, appoint Marg Allan as Chairperson of the Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee for the period 1 April 2026 to 28 February 2027.

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 appoints an Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Chairperson annually, with the most recent appointment being made by Council at its meeting in February 2025.

BACKGROUND

Clause 5.4 (Chairperson) of the Audit and Risk Committee Charter v12 states:

- *The Chairperson of the Committee must be an independent member*
- *Council will appoint the Chairperson of the Committee following recommendation of the Committee*
- *If the Chairperson is unable to attend a meeting, the members in attendance at the meeting will appoint a Chairperson by resolution for that meeting from among the attending members.*

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

At its meeting held 23 February 2026, the ARC resolved 'That a recommendation be presented to Council to appoint Marg Allan as Chairperson of the Loddon Shire Audit and Risk Committee for the period 1 April 2026 to 28 February 2027'.

Marg Allan has been a member of Council's Audit and Risk Committee since 26 July 2023 and holds a number of qualifications including in Business, Public Policy and Governance. Marg has held a number of executive level roles at Victorian Councils, a regional director role in State Government and has undertaken Local Government Minister appointed Municipal Monitor roles across the state. Marg is also a current board member of the Victorian Local Government Grants Commission.

COST/BENEFITS

The benefit of an annual process to select an ARC Chairperson (including election if required) is providing all Committee Members with the opportunity to lead the Committee in its work for and on behalf of Council.

Clause 5.7 of the Audit and Risk Committee Charter states that remuneration will be paid to each ARC Independent Member in accordance with section 53(6) of the (Local Government) Act.

At its meeting on 22 April 2025, Council resolved to increase the quarterly remuneration paid to independent members of the Audit and Risk Committee to \$585, effective the quarter commencing 1 May 2025, and maintain payment of an extra quarter remuneration to the Chairperson during a one year term.

RISK ANALYSIS

An annual appointment of Chairperson provides all members with the opportunity to lead the Committee.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Members of the Committee nominate the Chairperson of the ARC and recommend appointment to Council.

RESOLUTION 2026/36

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council, on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, appoint Marg Allan as Chairperson of the Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee for the period 1 April 2026 to 28 February 2027.

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

10.5 ENDORSEMENT OF THE RESOURCE READY NORTH-WESTERN VICTORIA ENERGY AND MINING IMPACT AND READINESS STRATEGY

File Number:

Author: Renae Colls, Executive Assistant

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: 1. Resource Ready - North-Western Victoria Energy and Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. endorse the Resource Ready - North-Western Victoria Energy and Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy (the Strategy);
2. commit to working with key stakeholders to implement the Strategy's recommended actions;
3. advocate to State and Federal governments for funding and policy change to implement priority actions identified in the Strategy; and
4. notes that successful implementation of the Strategy requires substantial external funding and regional coordination well beyond Council's existing resources or decision-making authority.

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

Councillors previously discussed the Draft Resource Ready - North-Western Victoria Energy and Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy at the November 2025 Council Forum and considered the Strategy at the March 2026 Council Briefing.

BACKGROUND

The Resource Ready North-Western Victoria Energy and Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy (the Strategy) provides an independent analysis of the potential impacts from \$27.7 billion in planned transmission, renewable energy and mining projects across nine north-western Victorian councils.

The study examines the north-western Victorian region and includes nine participating councils (Study Area councils): Buloke, Gannawarra, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Loddon, Northern Grampians, Swan Hill, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack. Collectively, these municipalities cover 58,503 square kilometres (approximately 26% of Victoria) and represent a regional population of 93,100 residents, supporting around 42,300 jobs across the study area.

The Strategy identifies the potential scale of renewable energy infrastructure and mining across the study area and identifies the significant workforce demands including 9,100 construction jobs and 2,300 ongoing operational roles, alongside critical challenges such as severe housing shortages, labour market constraints, infrastructure pressures and potential impacts on the region's agricultural sector.

The Strategy outlines 49 actions under 11 key themes to prepare the region, maximise community benefits and reduce negative impacts if major projects are approved by State and Federal governments.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Council's endorsement of the Strategy would not constitute support for or opposition to any specific project. Rather, endorsement reflects Council's commitment to fulfilling its statutory obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020* to plan strategically for the community's economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The Strategy equips Council with the evidence base necessary to assess mining and renewable energy projects comprehensively, advocate effectively for State and Federal funding to address readiness gaps, coordinate with regional partners, and engage meaningfully with the community about potential changes.

Implementation fundamentally depends on significant external funding that exceeds Council's current resources, and a willingness from other levels of government to implement policy change. Endorsement by Council provides a foundation for obtaining this support from higher levels of government and project proponents, without obligating the Council to independently finance all recommended actions.

The Strategy adopts an impartial, analytical approach, prioritising preparedness and impact management rather than promoting or opposing the energy and mining transition, specific technologies or particular project approvals.

The Study Area councils commissioned an independent Strategy to assess the impacts of:

- VNI West transmission project (\$7.1 billion) and transmission upgrades (\$3.37 billion);
- 33 renewable energy projects (13GW+ generation capacity); and
- 22 mining projects (mineral sands, gold, rare earth elements).

Key Findings

The economic impacts identified are summarised as follows:

- total capital expenditure: \$27.7 billion (\$2.8 billion expected locally);
- construction phase: 9,100 FTE jobs over time, peaking at approximately 4,000 workers (10% increase in regional employment);
- operational phase: 2,400 ongoing jobs (80% expected locally); and
- annual operational expenditure: \$888 million (67% locally captured).

The critical challenges are summarised as follows:

- labour shortages: very high workforce participation (92-97% for ages 25-54) and low unemployment (<4.5%) limit local capacity;
- housing crisis: extremely low rental vacancy (0-1.2%), declining rental stock and low development feasibility;
- infrastructure pressure: local roads, telecommunications, water supply, and electricity networks under strain;
- agricultural impacts: competition for labour, water, and land from major projects threatens the region's primary economic driver;
- community readiness: growing uncertainty and opposition to projects affecting social cohesion; and
- council capacity: low rate bases and resource constraints limit ability to assess and respond to major projects.

The Strategy outlines 44 recommended actions (*Table 21. Action Plan*) under eight key themes (Figure 40. Themes, Issues and Objectives):

- Community readiness
- Transport
- Housing
- Labour force
- Local government
- Agricultural
- Capturing economic benefits
- Managing competition for resources

The successful implementation of the Strategy requires significant State and Federal government funding.

Why is the Strategy Important?

Council lacks statutory authority over mining and renewable energy project approvals, which are handled by State and Federal governments through channels like Environmental Effects Statements and ministerial or mining license decisions. Nonetheless, Council must assess referrals, comment on local impacts, engage communities, plan for services and infrastructure, and advocate for regional interests. The Strategy provides an evidence-based framework for assessing regional impacts, readiness gaps, and resource needs to ensure reliable service provision during transitions.

Many renewable energy, transmission, and mining projects in the region are at varied stages of investigation and approval. Should major projects gain necessary approvals, Council will be responsible for managing their impacts and benefits for current and future generations - a responsibility mandated by the *Local Government Act 2020*. The Strategy's 49 actions focus on regional readiness, housing, workforce development, infrastructure, agriculture, community engagement, resourcing, and benefit-sharing, regardless of specific project outcomes or timelines.

The Strategy does not promote or oppose energy transition, technologies, or individual projects, but objectively analyses potential regional change (\$23.9 billion identified projects), economic impacts (up to 9,000 construction jobs and 2,300 ongoing operational jobs), and necessary actions to protect community wellbeing and deliver lasting benefits.

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires strategic planning for municipal sustainability. While population projections show decline (Figure 26. Estimated Resident Population, Study Area 2014-2036), the Strategy highlights that large-scale project construction could require thousands of additional workers, intensifying demands on housing, infrastructure, and services. Without strategic preparation, Council would be unable to effectively address these impacts in its plans and budgets.

Endorsement of the Strategy enables Council to:

- incorporate evidence-based scenarios into strategic and financial planning documents that account for potential major project impacts alongside business-as-usual trends;
- advocate from an informed position for State and Federal funding to address regional readiness gaps, armed with rigorous analysis of infrastructure, housing, and service needs,
- fulfil assessment obligations for major project referrals with comprehensive understanding of cumulative regional impacts rather than assessing each project in isolation,
- engage meaningfully with communities about potential changes, impacts, and opportunities using credible regional analysis rather than speculation,
- coordinate regionally with the eight other Study Area councils facing similar challenges, achieving efficiencies and greater advocacy influence through alignment; and
- demonstrate prudent governance by planning proactively for potential futures rather than responding reactively to circumstances as they develop.

Funding Implications

The Strategy notes that implementing its actions needs substantial external funding and regional coordination beyond Council's current resources. Endorsement sets a framework for advocating to State and Federal governments and project proponents for support, rather than obligating Council to fund or deliver all 49 actions. Council focuses on identifying needs, coordinating partners, and seeking appropriate funding, not covering all costs.

The analysis warns of risks if major projects lack proper preparation: labour shortages in agriculture and services, increased housing demand from construction workers, deteriorating roads, overstrained infrastructure, and weakened community cohesion due to poor engagement and benefit-sharing.

Endorsement of Strategy

Council's endorsement of the Strategy signals its commitment to collaborating with all government levels and industry to minimise risks and maximise benefits if major projects proceed after State and Federal approvals.

It is important to note that:

- approval decisions for transmission, renewable energy, or mining projects are made at higher government levels, not by Council;
- regional impacts, such as those affecting shared infrastructure, labour, and housing, can be missed in individual assessments. Taking a holistic regional approach benefits all Councils;
- regional preparation is crucial; without it, communities may experience negative effects if projects advance;
- The Strategy supplies evidence needed for effective advocacy in State and Federal processes; and
- Council maintains obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020* to plan for community needs, provide services and infrastructure, and ensure financial health regardless of project positions.

By adopting the Strategy, Council demonstrates responsible governance by preparing for potential changes, ensuring community wellbeing and fulfilling statutory duties in line with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

COST/BENEFITS

Funding for the Strategy was primarily funded by VicGrid, with each of the Study Area councils contributing \$3,500 and Swan Hill Rural City Council contributing \$20,000.

RISK ANALYSIS

The Loddon Shire municipality is a significant agricultural area. Decision making regarding mining, mineral extraction, transmission infrastructure and renewable energy developments largely sits outside Council's control, however the impacts of these activities are experienced locally. While such developments can generate substantial profits, they can also place increased demands on local government resources and responsibilities.

The Strategy aims to minimise potential financial, reputational and resourcing risks to Councils, while advocating for appropriate support and ensuring that local benefits are realised should these activities occur within the municipality.

Local Government Act 2020 and Statutory Compliance:

- Council's statutory obligations continue regardless of Strategy endorsement;
- major project referrals will still require Council assessment and response; and
- inadequate responses could expose Council to legal or regulatory risk.

Community Expectations:

- community will expect Council to respond to major project impacts; and
- community confusion about Council's role will persist without clear communication.

Regional Relationships:

- eight other councils are considering the same Strategy; and
- divergent approaches could undermine regional coordination.

Advocacy Position:

- not endorsing weakens Council's advocacy position with State/Federal governments;
- clear articulation of what Council needs to fulfill its obligations.

Financial Implications:

- costs will be incurred regardless of endorsement (statutory assessment obligations);
- alternative motion should address resource allocation and budget implications; and
- transparency about what Council can and cannot do within existing resources.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The Strategy was jointly developed by nine Study Area councils - Buloke, Gannawarra, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Loddon, Northern Grampians, Swan Hill, West Wimmera, and Yarriambiack, through the commissioning of independent regional analysis. Targeted consultation was undertaken with Regional Development Victoria, Wimmera Southern Mallee Development, VicGrid, and project proponents.

Effective implementation depends on sustained collaboration with State agencies and regional stakeholders, supported by significant external funding and coordination beyond the capacity of any single council. This approach reflects the reality that major project approvals sit with State and Federal governments, and that pressures on labour supply, housing and infrastructure can only be addressed through coordinated, cross-boundary action.

RESOLUTION 2026/37

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council:

1. notes the Resource Ready - North-Western Victoria Energy and Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy (the Strategy);
2. commit to working with key stakeholders to implement the Strategy's recommended actions;
3. advocate to State and Federal governments for funding and policy change to implement priority actions identified in the Strategy; and
4. notes that successful implementation of the Strategy requires substantial external funding and regional coordination well beyond Council's existing resources or decision-making authority.

CARRIED

10.6 ADOPTION OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CHARTER

File Number:**Author:** Janine Jackson, Manager Organisation Development**Authoriser:** Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate**Attachments:** 1. Customer Experience Charter

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Loddon Shire Council Customer Experience Charter.

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

At the 28 October 2025 Council Meeting, Councillors adopted the Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029.

At the November 2025 Council Briefing, Councillors discussed the Customer Experience Charter (the Charter) and shared their expectations around responsiveness. Councillors also identified the need for benchmarking against other Councils and the need for further discussion before progressing the document.

At the December 2025 Council Briefing, Councillors revisited the Charter considering the benchmarking insights. Those insights and further discussion informed the proposed service standards and shaped the development of the Customer Experience Charter.

BACKGROUND

The previous Customer Service Charter was included in the body of the previous Customer Service Strategy, but with the recent adoption of the new Customer Experience Strategy (the CX Strategy) in October 2025, the charter was separated out to be a standalone item and work commenced on its review.

In addition to discussions with the Councillors, workshops with officers across the organisation provided key operational insights that further informed the proposed service standards and guided the development of the Charter.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The review of the Charter is the first action in the CX Strategy and is an important step in supporting Council's strategic objective that '*Loddon Shire will deliver exceptional service to the community*'.

Key changes

Compared to the previous iteration of the Charter, key changes in the new Customer Experience Charter include:

- Reducing the response timeframe for electronic correspondence from three days to two.
- Aligning the Charter name with the Customer Experience Strategy.
- Updating language to ensure it is inclusive and relevant to all Council officers.
- Speaking directly to customers to clearly outline what they can expect.
- Promoting generic Council contact channels to support a consistent and high-quality customer experience.

New additions to the Charter include:

- Clear definitions to support a consistent approach to understanding and triaging enquiries.
- A section outlining how customers can help us deliver better service.
- Information on how performance will be measured to support continuous improvement.

The success of this Charter relies heavily on education across both officers and the community. Once adopted, the next steps will focus on ensuring that officers and community members clearly understand how to engage with Customers and with Council to support the best possible customer experience.

Gender Impact Assessment

In accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) was undertaken for this Charter. The assessment examined potential gendered impacts in the delivery of Council services to the community. The GIA found that the Charter was developed with consideration of the needs of people of all genders and applied an intersectional approach throughout.

COST/BENEFITS

The development and implementation of the charter is undertaken within existing resources

RISK ANALYSIS

The Charter is a key document that guides the organisation in delivering consistent, transparent, and accountable service to the community, while also mitigating reputational risk.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Workshops held across various workgroups provided feedback that directly informed the development of the Charter. Community engagement undertaken during the CX Strategy's development was also considered.

In addition, previous Councillor discussions referenced in this report helped shape the final Charter.

RESOLUTION 2026/38

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo
Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council adopts the Loddon Shire Council Customer Experience Charter.

CARRIED

11 INFORMATION REPORTS

Nil

Unconfirmed

12 COMPLIANCE REPORTS

12.1 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE UPDATE

File Number:**Author:** Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes the summary of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting – 23 February 2026.

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 most recently received an update on a Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) meeting at its December 2025 meeting.

BACKGROUND

Council's ARC has been established in accordance with section 53 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, to support it in discharging its oversight responsibilities related to financial and performance reporting, risk management, fraud prevention systems and control, maintenance of a sound internal control environment, assurance activities including internal and external audit, and Council's performance with regard to compliance with its policies and legislative and regulatory requirements.

This report is a requirement of the ARC Charter which states 'A summary of each ARC meeting will be reported at the next meeting of the Council.'

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Following is a summary of the ARC meeting held on Monday, 23 February 2026 in the Loddon Shire Council Chambers.

Member attendees:

Marg Allan –Independent Member (Chair)
Rod Poxon –Independent Member
Amber Currie –Independent Member
Mick Cummins –Independent Member
Cr Miki Wilson – Substitute Councillor Representative

Officer attendees:

Lincoln Fitzgerald – Chief Executive Officer
Michelle Stedman – Director Corporate
Natalie Martin – Manager Financial Services
Tracy Hunt – Governance Coordinator

Other attendees:

Brad Ead – AFS & Associates Pty Ltd
Mahesh Silva – RSD Audit for Agenda item 6.7
Genevieve Plozza – Continuous Improvement Coordinator (as an observer)

Apologies:

Cr Gavan Holt

The following matters were considered by the ARC at the meeting:

Report	Discussion points
Status of actions generated during ARC meetings	<p>The ARC considered a report on the status of actions generated during its meetings.</p> <p>The Committee acknowledged and noted all five resolutions arising from 17 November 2025 Audit and Risk Committee meeting decision reports have been acted upon; one resolution, arising from the 1 September 2025 Audit and Risk Committee meeting has now been acted upon; and one action requested by the Audit and Risk Committee during the course of past meetings remains outstanding.</p>
CEO Report	<p>The ARC resolved to receive and note a report from the CEO updating the Committee on a number of matters associated with the Charter including fraud and corruption; Council's Staff Code of Conduct; information security and privacy; financial management; Council's Enterprise Agreement; flood restoration; and Skinners Flat Reservoir.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the MAV-commissioned 'Report into the Financial Sustainability of Victorian Small Councils' going forward and the possibility of using the same financial indicators for financial reporting to Council and the ARC.</p>
Audit and Risk Committee Charter Review	<p>The ARC considered a report on a recent review of the ARC Charter.</p> <p>The review considered compliance with legislation and Council policy, VAGO report recommendations, responses received in the most recent ARC Annual Performance Assessment and discussed where the committee could add most value to Council.</p> <p>The ARC endorsed the Draft reviewed Charter (v13) and recommended its adoption to Council, with adjustments that retain the current member composition and terms, and the Committee's responsibility for monitoring compliance systems, and place the obligation to ascertain a member's interest in reappointment on Council rather than the member.</p> <p>The Charter will be prepared for presentation to Council's April meeting.</p>
Appointment of Chairperson – 2026/27	<p>Following a call for nominations from the CEO, one nomination was received, being Marg Allan, which was supported by all members.</p> <p>The ARC resolved that a recommendation be presented to Council to appoint Marg Allan as Chairperson of the Committee for the period 1 April 2026 to 28 February 2027.</p>
Strategic Internal Audit Program (SIAP) status update and Internal Audit scope review	<p>The ARC received and noted an update on the delivery status of the Strategic Internal Audit Program 2024 - 2027 and endorsed a high-level scope for a review of Contract Management.</p>
Progress on open audit recommendations	<p>The ARC considered a report on the status of actions from past internal audits, endorsing six completed actions to be closed; approving adjusted due dates for the completion of twelve actions; and noting the progress by management on open actions. Following discussion on adjusted due date requests, the Committee requested future reports include the history of adjusted due dates if this is able to be generated within the Pulse system without manual production each time.</p>

Report	Discussion points
Quarterly review of finance reports and performance reports	The ARC considered and noted the Finance Report for the quarter ending 31 December 2025.
External Audit Strategy Memorandum Review	The ARC noted a report on the External Audit Strategy Memorandum 2025-26 presented by a representative from RSD Audit
Review of Council's Financial Reserves	<p>The ARC considered and noted a report on Council's Financial Reserves, endorsing the rationalisation of Council's financial reserves in accordance with the Financial Reserves Policy (v12) and requesting consideration be given to the strategic application of the funds that are no longer being held in Financial Reserves.</p> <p>The Chair of the ARC acknowledged the diligence of past councils in maintaining and growing the financial reserves, which has put Council in a better financial position than many small rural councils.</p>
Review of the Budget Management and Principles Policy	<p>The ARC considered a report on the newly developed Budget Management and Principles Policy, that establishes the overarching framework guiding the formulation, review and approval of Council's annual budget, and the circumstances in which Council would formally revise the budget.</p> <p>The ARC resolved to request the addition to the draft Policy of a criteria-based prioritisation principle for investment in new/upgrade/renewal of assets, and to endorse the Policy, with the above addition and recommend its adoption to Council.</p>
Business Continuity Framework and Testing Regime	The ARC received and noted a report on the status of Council's Business Continuity management, including review and testing the Business Continuity Plan (BCP)
Review of Internal Control Environment policies and plans	The ARC received and noted a report on key policies and plans supporting Council's Internal Control Environment.
Investigations undertaken by regulatory and integrity agencies relevant to Council	<p>The ARC received and noted a report on reports and publications of interest to local government.</p> <p>During consideration of the report, the Committee recommended Officers review and consider content within the recent Municipal Monitor's Final Report to the Minister for Local Government on the Strathbogie Shire Council.</p>
Matters referred by Councillor representative	The ARC discussed Council's Project Management Framework and the undertaking of service reviews.
General Business	Prior to closing the meeting, ARC members and the CEO thanked and acknowledged Independent Member, Rod Poxon who, prior to the next meeting will have completed the maximum three terms on the Committee.

COST/BENEFITS

This report provides Council with oversight of the work of the ARC, providing a level of surety that services are undertaken efficiently and effectively.

There are no costs associated with development of this report, however there are modest costs associated with the Audit and Risk Committee and undertaking regular internal and external auditing of Council activities. These costs are provided for in Council's approved budget.

RISK ANALYSIS

The ARC has risk management oversight for the Council and monitors, reviews, endorses and advises Council on matters as set out in the Charter.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Officers involved in the conduct of the ARC meeting were consulted in the preparation of this report.

RESOLUTION 2026/39

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt
Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council receives and notes the summary of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting – 23 February 2026.

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

13 URGENT BUSINESS

Nil

14 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Nil

NEXT MEETING

The next Meeting of Council will be held on 28 April 2026 at Wedderburn commencing at 3.00pm.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 4.05 pm.

Confirmed this.....day of..... 2026

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CHAIRPERSON

Unconfirmed