

2022/2023 - MAYORAL BUDGET STATEMENT

Good morning Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present the 2022/2023 budget to Council. First let us reflect on the 2021/2022 financial year that has seen the completion of a number of significant projects including Digital Connectivity, Wild Dog Exclusion Fencing, Splash Park and the Library Hub. Council also successfully completed over \$50m in flood recovery works from the February 2020 flood event. Balonne Shire has continued to be challenged with flood events and COVID-19 restrictions and it is hoped that our 2022/23 financial year can be one of consolidation to finalise those projects disrupted by flood events and to recognise the impact on the economy and to help our communities recover.

Our Corporate Plan has been reviewed and from 1 July 2022 Council will report against its revised vision *'Welcoming, connected and innovative communities, where economies are strong and opportunities are abundant.'* Council continues to aim for financial sustainability and has recently welcomed an increase in revenue arising from the Queensland Grants Commission review of the distribution of the Federal Assistance Grants. The Federal Assistance Grants provide funding for general operations and road maintenance. Council successfully achieved ISO accreditation for its quality, environmental and safety systems for transport and infrastructure. Council is near achieving the Department of Transport and Main Roads National Prequalification System for Civil (Road and Bridge) Construction Contracts. These two initiatives will improve our ability to perform road contract works both in and outside the Shire to earn additional revenue.

The key focus for 2022/2023 budget will be the finalisation of the following key projects, the majority of which are made possible through State and Federal funding:

- Flood gauges and monitoring cameras across the catchment (Queensland Resilience & Risk Reduction Fund)
- Upgrade of Victoria Street (Federal Local Roads Community Infrastructure funds (LRCIP) and Federal Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program (MDBEDP))
- Balonne Shire beautification project for shop facades and energy efficiency (MDBEDP)
- St George General Aviation Project (Queensland Building Our Regions funding and LRCIP)
- Business Mentoring program (MDBEDP)
- Mungindi River foreshore development (Cross Borders, Works for Queensland and Local Grants & Subsidies Program)
- Mungindi Sculpture Walk (MDBEDP)

The budget will also commence with:

- Planning of an industrial development adjacent the St George aerodrome (LRCIP)
- A plan for expansion to the St George cemetery
- Improvement to the Beardmore Dam Facility (Queensland's Fishing Infrastructure Grant and Works for Queensland)
- Upgrades to the Dirranbandi Rail & River Precinct (MDBEDP)
- Construction of 1 dwelling and 2 duplexes for staff accommodation (Works for Queensland)
- Upgrade of the Audio-Visual equipment in our Cultural Centre Hall and new meeting rooms (LRCIP)
- Upgrade to the Bollon-Mitchell Road (Remote Roads Pilot Upgrade Program)

These are just some of the initiatives we will progress in 2022/2023 that provide opportunity and support for local business, landholders and contractors to work with council to deliver the projects. Another key focus will be our local road network and the need to complete emergent and flood recovery works from the March 2021, November 2021, February-March 2022 and May 2022 rainfall and flood events. We understand the frustration of our rural landholders and townships who have been isolated for many months at a time and who have had their business, harvests and stock impacted.

CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM

Council will deliver a capital works program of \$21.284m with over \$13.486m of this funded by grant programs. Council will also utilise reserve funds of \$1.628m for asset management across our water and wastewater programs.

Local Roads

The capital works program for local roads is supplemented by \$1.728m in Federal Government Roads to Recovery program and \$1.040m in Queensland Transport Infrastructure Development funds, with a rolling program out to 2026/2027. The funding will provide for upgrades and renewals to our local road network including \$939,240 on the Jakelwar Goodooga Road. The full program of works is outlined in the Capital Works budget and our Asset Standing Committee is reviewing Asset Management Plans for our local road network.

Plant

A world-wide shortage has delayed the supply of plant and vehicles, increasing the budget with 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 rolling into one plant replacement program. The 2021/2022 vehicles ordered in August 2021 are starting to arrive and our Plant Standing Committee is working on a ten-year rolling Asset Management and Replacement program.

Recreation

Council continues to recognise the importance of sport and recreation across the Shire and continues to work with our Community User Groups for Showgrounds and Sporting Facilities. Projects to be completed include the Hebel Showground Shed and Canteen. This project has been delayed by road closures during flood events and funded by LRCIP (\$209,148). Projects include upgrade to the Dirranbandi Polocrosse viewing area (\$26,000); relocation of river pump at St George Showgrounds (\$50,000) and finalising the remaining Drought Community Program funds across the Shire Showgrounds (\$52,190). Rowden Park St George includes a cricket pitch \$20,000 and basketball court \$80,000 (LRCIP) and completion of top dressing of the sports field \$38,472 and a new footpath \$18,000.

The St George Swimming pool will be re-lined \$270,338 (over two financial years \$135,169 per year); the river foreshore projects at St George and Mungindi will be completed. A new toilet block will be constructed at Bollon (\$342,000); improvements to the Thallon Campgrounds funded by Queensland Fishing Infrastructure fund (\$100,000) and other improvements to Thallon Park (\$120,000) (LRCIP). Council will also continue to invest in festive lighting across the Shire. (\$65,000)

Water, Wastewater Projects

The 2022/2023 budget will fund a number of projects to upgrade and renew water mains across the Shire and is subject to a number of funding programs awaiting decision. Council will utilise its reserve funds of \$1.120m to continue to upgrade and renew water assets. Council will also develop a Water Security and Cooling Plan with funding from Building our Regions that will research options to improve water services across the Shire.

The wastewater program is \$358,000 utilising reserved funds for asset management.

Footpaths, Kerbs and Drainage

Stormwater works are being planned for Dirranbandi, St George and Mungindi (\$480,000) and \$100,000 in kerb replacement and upgrade in Main Street Dirranbandi. Nindigully foreshore footpath will see culverts installed to assist with ongoing silt issues along this popular tourist walk. (\$30,000). Bollon's Wallam Creek footpath will also receive \$25,000 in renewals.

OPERATIONAL PROJECTS

Council's Operational Projects Budget for 2022/2023 (excluding flood recovery works) is \$10.324m with grant funding of \$9.381m.

Projects to be delivered include:

- upgrades to Beardmore Dam with Queensland Fishing Infrastructure fund and Works for Queensland
- Shirewide mental health services (\$69,457 - Rural Remote Council Grant Program)
- Multicultural program (\$116,200 - Regional Partnerships Queensland)
- Tourism promotion (\$163,600)
- Waste management minor projects including signage and trenches (\$112,000)
- Cultural Burning Weed Management (\$566,000 – Advancing Pest & Weeds Control Solutions)
- Master Plans for Thallon, Hebel and Victoria & Henry Streets, St George
- Bush gardens, St George (\$20,500)
- Business Improvement Scheme and Business Mentoring Program (MDBEDP)

In addition to specifically funded projects there are the many council operations supporting community liveability and sustainability such as:

- Tourism and economic initiatives, events, programs, tours and trails
- Planning Scheme review and public consultation
- Local Laws review and public consultation; public safety from food licencing to dog registration
- Website improvement including initiatives making planning and building development easier
- New library hub – expanded programs and activation as an event venue, greater integration of the library network, and partnership with the Country University Centre
- A growing number of Council and facilitated community events and programs post-covid with Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) and Community Grants
- Stronger Indigenous relationships with recognition of native title, Indigenous Land Use Agreements, cultural burning, and consultation
- Active Biosecurity Committee and Wild Dog Advisory Committee revising priorities with the strength of Shire fencing
- Development of the youth council and youth engagement partnerships

Road Performance Contracts

Council has a number of Road performance contracts with Queensland Transport & Main Roads with over \$5.7m to be completed in 2022/2023. Council's Road Performance Maintenance Contract with the Queensland Transport & Main Roads will continue with \$4m proposed across the State controlled road network.

RATES & CHARGES – what's changed

Council may apply limitations to the increase in general rates where land valuations significantly increase. In the 2022/2023 financial year Council will apply a 20% limitation across all rating categories. In summary, this means that any property that did experience a significant increase in their land valuation in the 2020/2021 revaluation may experience an increase in their general rate of up to 20% for 2022/2023. If you disagree with your land

valuation you can contact the Valuer General to dispute the valuation.
<https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/title/valuation/about/dispute>.

Council will offer a 60 day 10% discount period for the August 2022 levy, across all rating categories. This will revert to the standard 30 day period for the February 2023 levy. It is proposed to continue the relief from the accrued interest on outstanding rates for those who enter and honour their payment plans.

Resident/Commercial/Industrial

This year the average residential, industrial and commercial property will not see an increase in general rates (subject to limitations).

Utility charges will increase with Water and sewerage up by 6% and cleansing (waste) charges up by 14.5%. The rise in cost represents the move to full cost recovery for the services provided. On average a typical residential property will see an increase of \$120 per annum in their rate notice.

River Water Charges – St George – Residential and Rural Residential only

Council has adopted a scale of excess charges on water allocations for river water in St George. This will impact those properties that use in excess of the allocation of 1500KL per annum.

Rural

Rural categories will continue to move to a single rural rate by 2025/26. Rural categories may see a movement in their general rate according to the seven year rural rating strategy.

Mungindi

Residents in Mungindi will see changes to waste utility charges in line with Moree Plains Shire Council plus 5% administration fee across all categories. Water charges will remain the same for Mungindi as previous years.

Concessions

Pensioners will continue to receive a maximum concession of \$170 per annum for qualifying properties. Community Rates Support will be applied for eligible community and sporting groups.

Fact sheets on all rating changes can also be viewed on Council's website at www.balonne.qld.gov.au/rates

Closing Remarks

The proposed budget has a net recurrent deficit result of \$1.693m including capital revenue. The nine-year forecast indicates net surplus results from recurrent operations as we work towards financial sustainability. When taking into account one off projects, that are non-recurring, the overall net result for 2022/2023 is a surplus after capital of \$8.582m. The total revenue is \$47.654m and expenditure of \$39.072m.

The Capital works program for 2022/2023 is forecast at \$21.284m.

Council is committed to delivering the best outcomes for our community and continues to work hard at a Regional, State and Federal level to represent the interests of our Shire.

I take this opportunity to thank all councillors, executive team and staff for developing the budget, rating strategies and operational plan that will benefit our Shire.

To our ratepayers and all who live, work and play in the Balonne Shire we appreciate your support, patience and co-operation as we seek to improve our local road network and complete flood recovery works. Council will continue to stimulate the economy, where it can, to create work and jobs as we roll out the funding programs. Our first priority will be to focus on disaster recovery initiatives to support our local businesses, landholders and residents.



Cr Samantha O'Toole

MAYOR

Tabled at the Special Council Meeting to adopt the budget on Tuesday 28 June 2022.