



BLAYNEY SHIRE COUNCIL

SPECIAL VARIATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

7 November 2023

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INTRODUCTION

Council has flagged the need for a Special Rate Variation (SRV) in its strategic planning documents;

- Long Term Financial Plan
- Delivery Program and Operational Plan

At the 27 June 2023 Council Meeting Council resolved (resolution 2306/E005) to commence the SRV application process ensure it has sufficient revenue to:

- Improve financial sustainability by eliminating the General Fund operating deficit's;
- Deliver the services adopted within its Integrated Planning and Reporting documents;
- Provide sufficient funding to meet asset renewal funding requirements and appropriately manage the infrastructure backlog;
- Meet compliance obligations under the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) and other forms of legislation;
- Address continual financial implications mandated and/or cost shifting from the NSW Government;
- Address Council's unsustainable reliance on mining rate income (current and future) and develop strategies to reduce this reliance.

Progression of the Special Variation application will be subject to further Council approval and a future community engagement process as per the requirements of the Office of Local Government and the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) with a view to making application for the 2024/25 financial year.

Criterion 2 in the SRV Guidelines is:

Evidence that the community is aware of the need for and extent of a rate rise. The Delivery Program and Long Term Financial Plan should clearly set out the extent of the General Fund rate rise under the special variation. In particular, councils need to communicate the full cumulative increase of the proposed special variation in percentage terms, and the total increase in dollar terms for the average ratepayer, by rating category. The council's community engagement strategy for the special variation must demonstrate an appropriate variety of engagement methods to ensure community awareness and input occur.

At the Council meeting on 9 November 2023, Council will consider options for a potential SRV and seek a resolution to commence community engagement and awareness of the potential SRV application.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Council is committed to the involvement of the community in development of policies, programs and services and ensuring that all views are considered through inclusive deliberation and active involvement of the community.

It is intended that the community engagement for this project will be in alignment with Councils Community Engagement Strategy and Policy framework.

Engaging the community is required by all Councils under Council's Charter Section 8 of the NSW Local Government Act 1993. The charter comprises a set of principles, where eleven out of fourteen principles directly reflect why Council should engage the community, these principles are outlined in Councils Community Engagement Strategy and Policy framework.

For our Council to meet these principles, it needs to ensure that effective levels of engagement are implemented. This means that the Council needs to be open and accountable to the community and provide ample opportunity for feedback.

Council also acknowledges that by involving a cross section of the process, it can make better decisions. Council also knows that strong relationships community in a consultative with the community is integral and is built on trust, goodwill and respect with the community.

SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS

These 'characteristics of success' will guide and inform how we design, implement and provide feedback on the outputs and outcomes of our community engagement activities:

- ✓ The purpose of the engagement and how the input of the engagement will be used is clearly stated.
- ✓ Activities are timely, held at the right time and given enough time.
- ✓ Include all groups and organisations that have an interest in the engagement topic or issue
- ✓ Create safe space and a positive atmosphere
- ✓ Information is accessible
- ✓ Existing networks are used
- ✓ The capacity and capabilities of community leaders is developed and strengthened
- ✓ It is not a 'one size fits all'
- ✓ The correct level of engagement is used (Impact/Complexity Matrix)


GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The design and development of engagement activities in Blayney Shire will be guided by the following principles. We will strive to make all engagement:

- Inclusive and accessible
- Productive and enterprising
- Approachable and welcoming
- Consistent so we know where we stand
- Engaging, exciting and inspiring

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

The level of engagement is defined from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation in the figure below. This spectrum outlines the level of engagement required depending on the purpose and desired outcome of the project.

		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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Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

STEPS IN PLANNING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When undertaking community engagement, Council will follow six steps and ask a series of associated questions:

1. Establish the level of impact and complexity of the project, program or action

2. Identify all those communities of interest who have an interest around the issue
3. Plan the engagement process and gather or develop relevant information and resources
4. Engage the relevant and identified communities of interest
5. Feedback results of engagement and decision making if relevant
6. Evaluate the process

The above steps are outlined below with Councils approach to the SRV community engagement process.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH PROJECT LEVEL AND COMPLEXITY

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

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

1. 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.
2. Show evidence that the **community is aware** of the need for and the extent of a rate rise.
3. Show that the **impact on affected ratepayers** is reasonable.
4. Exhibit, approve and adopt the relevant **IP&R documents**.
5. Explain and quantify the **productivity improvements and cost containment** strategies in its IP&R documents and/or application.

Engagement Criteria	Result	Definition
Level of Impact	High Impact	High level of impact or risk, perceived or real, on the whole or a large part of Blayney Shire
Levels of Engagement	Informing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising the community of a situation or proposal • Informing on a decision or direction • Providing advice on an issue • No response is required, although people are free to seek a further level of participation
	Consulting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking market research to identify needs or issues • Seeking comment on a proposal, action or issue • Seeking feedback on a service or facility • Requiring a response, but limited opportunity for dialogue • Option for people to seek a further level of participation

6. Address any other matter that IPART considers relevant.

To meet the SRV application 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.

To meet these criteria more fully, an updated Delivery Plan (DP) and LTFP, which includes the proposed SRV, will be exhibited in parallel to this community engagement process.

Post community engagement and exhibition Council will then consider any submissions prior to any decision regarding the SRV.

As a result, this community engagement action plan is drafted to meet both the **inform** and **consult** levels of engagement. This means that Council will provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, and preferred solution and to obtain the public's feedback on analysis and alternatives. Council will keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision made by Council.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

Stakeholder	Description	Interest	Impact	Impact and Concerns
Ratepayers	Landowners who are residents and non-resident ratepayers of the Blayney Shire LGA	H	H	The proposed rate increase and changes to Council services will directly impact ratepayers.
Renters	Renters who are residents of the Blayney Shire LGA	M	M	Renters will be unsure of the impact of the SRV as it will be unknown whether landlords will pass any rate increases on. Renters will be impacted by any changes to Council services
Landlords	Investment property owners of property within the Blayney Shire LGA	H	H	The proposed rate increase and changes to Council services will directly impact landlords, who also have the decision as to whether they pass any rate increases on
Business Owners	Business property owners and business operators with a commercial lease in the Blayney Shire LGA	H	H	The proposed rate increase and changes to Council services will directly impact business property owners. Commercial leaseholders will have a decision as to whether they pass any rate increases on.
Community Groups	Community, cultural, sporting, special interest groups, village and progress associations in the Blayney Shire LGA	M	M	Community group members are mostly local residents and need an understanding of why Council is proposing an SRV and any changes to service levels impacting their group. Most sporting groups rely on Council services and facilities and need an understanding of why Council is proposing an SRV and any changes to service levels impacting their group.
Media	Local and regional media organisations	H	L	The media has a potentially high level of influence on the community in communicating the messaging of the SRV whilst the impact directly on the media is low
IPART	Regulatory body for SRV applications	H	H	Approval body for SRV application
Councillors & Council Staff	Councillors and Staff of Blayney Shire Council	H	H	Councillors and staff need to be informed and consulted as part of the process and have a strong understanding of the engagement plan including key messages, background and next steps.

STEP 3: CREATE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

KEY MESSAGES

The key messages for the community should clearly communicate what the proposed SRV is, outline where further information can be obtained, encourage participation and feedback.

Non-negotiables include:

- the legislative requirement for Council to employ sound financial management principals.
- the current core deficits in the General Fund need to be addressed, targeting sufficient surpluses over time to ensure the ongoing financial sustainability of Council.

Community feedback is sought to:

- assess the level of community understanding of the proposed SRV and its impacts and why it is needed.
- seek feedback and submissions on the proposed SRV and the updated Long Term Financial Plan.

To support these key messages and the development of collateral for the community engagement activities, a background paper will be developed to articulate the need for and level of SRV being sought.

In addition, Council will also have the following reports:

1. A capacity to pay report which will investigate, analyse and report on the community's capacity to pay against Council's rating categories and proposed SRV. This includes research of specific areas across the Local Government Area (LGA) and will undertake a range of comparisons and assessments of information for areas/locations within the LGA, and associated land use.
2. An updated; Delivery Plan, Long term financial plan (LTFP) and financial sustainability analysis that will demonstrate the impact of the SRV on the ongoing financial sustainability of Council.
3. An Organisation Sustainability Improvement Plan that outlines what Council has achieved and what it will do to ensure that it contains costs, finds efficiency and productivity gains and remains organisationally sustainable.

MONITORING

During the consultation process, the level of engagement will be monitored by Council’s Communication and Engagement team.

Any proposed adjustments to the plan will be approved by the General Manager before implementation.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The table below documents the key risks associated with this community engagement. The risk ratings are assessments of the residual risk after the documented risk responses are implemented.

Risk	Risk response	Residual likelihood	Residual consequence	Residual risk rating
Engagement doesn’t meet IPART assessment criteria.	Engagement plan and activities analyse and integrate requirements to meet criteria.	Low	Medium	Low
Impact on ratepayers of raising rates at a time of high inflation and high cost of living pressures.	Capacity to pay analysis has been undertaken to understand the impacts of rate increase on community. Council also has an existing Pensioner & Hardship Policy (5E).	Medium	Medium	Medium

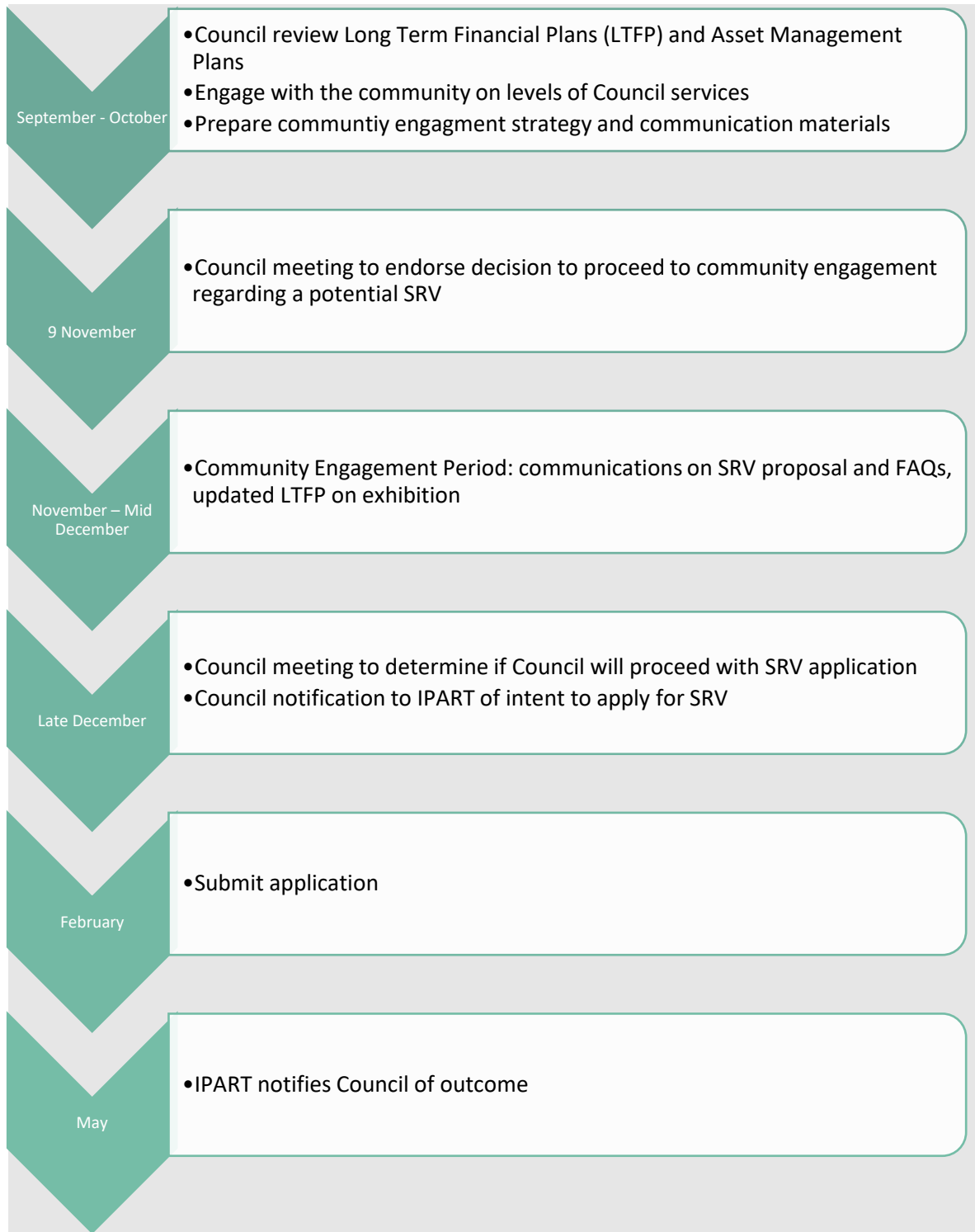
ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

Content	Distribution method	Purpose	Information included / Strategy	Timeframe
All updates and resources	Dedicated webpage on Council website	Inform and Consult	Dedicated webpage page that collates all information that is distributed including; Council report, SRV documentation, summary information, timelines, FAQs, information session times etc. Updates about where we are in the SRV process will be included e.g. Council meetings, IPART outcomes etc.	9 Nov
Media Release	Media distribution list	Inform	Media alert to be issued the day before Council Meeting advising of Media Event following the Council Meeting	Media Event 10am, 10 Nov
Mayor Video	Social media	Inform	Brief video on what is happening and encourage people to read information provided and attend sessions	10 Nov
Cover Letter and Information Sheet	Mailed to all rate payers (duplicates removed) Webpage Newspaper (Ad) E-newsletter	Inform	Includes a cover letter from the Mayor and information sheet which succinctly outlines: what is proposed, impact on rates, process and timeframes, where to find more information including opportunities to participate in meetings and/or drop-in session and how to provide feedback.	11 Nov
Frequently Asked Questions	Webpage Social Media Newspaper	Inform	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be available to answer predicted common questions. The FAQs will be able to be updated based on common FAQs received from ratepayers throughout the engagement process.	10 Nov
NSW Farmers Association	In Person	Inform and Consult	Local NSW Farmers Executive to be briefed.	Early Nov

Information and Drop in Sessions	In Person	Inform and Consult	Multiple drop-in sessions will be held throughout the Blayney Shire, including Blayney and villages providing an opportunity for the community to attend, ask questions and seek information on the proposed SRV.	Late Nov / Early Dec
Online Portal	Webpage Council Admin	Inform and Consult	Online portal to request a callback from a Councillor or Staff Member to discuss the SRV proposal, submit a question or make a submission on the SRV. Administration staff will be able to submit on behalf of callers over the phone where applicable.	Nov - Dec

STEP 4: ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

TIMELINE



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 SRV documentation and reports • Provide updated the Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) for exhibition • Prepare report on community engagement outcomes
Council - Manager Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop various material to inform Council communications • Publish and release materials in line with this community engagement action plan • Gather community feedback and provide to Morrison Low for analysis
Council - CFO & Senior Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review SRV documentation including updated 2022-32 LTFP (which includes the SRV)
Council - Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve community engagement plan • Participate in communication of material, community information sessions (when available) and engage with community members using agreed upon messaging
Council - General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief staff on SRV, process and community engagement activities • Attend most community information sessions • Endorse community engagement plan, approve any adjustments to community engagement process as required • Coordinate media interviews and public forums, where required

STEP 5: RESULTS OF ENGAGEMENT

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

A final community engagement report will be produced to document the outcomes of the engagement process, but also to clarify the extent to which the community engagement activities reached all relevant stakeholder groups. Measures to understand the level of reach and participation in the engagement process will include:

- number of letters mailed out
- number of emails sent out
- attendance at community engagement / drop in sessions
- SRV related inquiries through customer service
- number of submissions on the SRV proposal
- number of call backs / phone calls on the SRV
- key analytics from the SRV Information page e.g. downloads of documents
- reach on social media

Where feasible, measures of success would also include documenting key demographics of participants to ensure that it is both representative of the LGA community and engagement activities have reached groups that can sometimes be hard to reach.