City of
Mount Gambier

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Reference: AF11/877
Enquiries to: Mr Paul Simpson

MEMBERS

NOTICE is hereby given that the Mayor has called a Special Meeting of the Council to be held at the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, 10 Watson Terrace, Mount Gambier on the following date and time:

Tuesday 16 June 2026 - Council Chamber - Civic Centre (commencing at 5:00 pm)

For the purpose of:

1. 2026/2027 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget - Community Consultation Feedback

Please find Agenda attached.

Paul SIMPSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

15 June 2026

City of Mount Gambier

AGENDA

Special Council Meeting

Tuesday 16 June 2026

I hereby give notice that a Special Meeting of Council will be held on:

Time:	5:00 pm
Date:	Tuesday 16 June 2026
Location:	Council Chamber, Civic Centre 10 Watson Terrace, Mount Gambier

Paul Simpson
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
15 June 2026

Order of Business

1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE BOANDIK PEOPLES AS THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND WHERE WE MEET TODAY. WE RESPECT THEIR SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND AND RECOGNISE THE DEEP FEELINGS OF ATTACHMENT OUR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES HAVE WITH THE LAND.

2 CONDUCT OF THE GALLERY

MEMBERS OF THE GALLERY ARE REMINDED THAT THEY MUST NOT BEHAVE IN A DISORDERLY MANNER OR CAUSE AN INTERRUPTION TO THE MEETING. WHILST AUDIO RECORDING OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS IS PERMITTED, PHOTOGRAPHING, FILMING AND TELEVISING ARE PROHIBITED UNLESS EXPRESS PRIOR PERMISSION IS GRANTED BY THE PRESIDING MEMBER. WE ASK THAT YOU PLEASE PLACE YOUR PHONES ON SILENT. SHOULD AN EMERGENCY OCCUR AT ANY STAGE, PLEASE FOLLOW THE DIRECTION OF COUNCIL STAFF TO VACATE THE BUILDING.

3 APOLOGIES

Nil

4 LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Nil

5 COUNCIL REPORTS

5.1 2026/2027 DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Author: Kahli Rolton, Manager Financial Services

Authoriser: Jane Fetherstonhaugh, General Manager Corporate and Regulatory Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council report titled '2026/2027 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget - Community Consultation Feedback' as presented on Tuesday 16 June 2026 be noted.
2. That Council notes the written submissions and questions received on the 2026/2027 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget and Draft Long Term Financial Plan as attached to this report.
3. That Council thanks the organisations and individuals for their verbal submissions as presented at the Special Council Meeting on 16 June 2026.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with comments, feedback and questions arising from the public consultation for the 2026/2027 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget and Draft Long Term Financial Plan.

BACKGROUND / OPTIONS

Key Documents - Council's Annual Business Plan and Budget (ABP) was formulated within the guiding principles detailed in its suite of Strategic Management Plans, including the City of Mount Gambier Strategic Plan 2024-2028, Asset Management Plans (AMPs) and Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP). The Asset Management Plans, LTFP and Annual Business Plan and Budget were reviewed at the same time to ensure alignment and are intended to be reviewed together annually in future years.

Public Consultation - at the Council meeting on 19 May 2026, Council endorsed the Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget for the purposes of public consultation in accordance with Council Policy, Community Consultation and Engagement P195 and section 123 of the Local Government Act 1999.

Notification during the consultation period was provided through the following avenues:

Media Release – was initially issued on 21 May 2026 through Council's Newsroom to all local media outlets.

Media coverage

Date	Method	Media
21/05/2026	Media Release	City of Mount Gambier Newsroom
21/05/2026	Social Media	Facebook post
22/05/2026	Media Release	The Border Watch
26/05/2026	Public Notice	SE Voice
26/05/2026	Media Release	SE Voice
27/05/2026	Social Media	Facebook post and story
28/05/2026	Media Release	Mount Gambier Times
29/05/2026	Public Notice	Mount Gambier Times
30/05/2026	Public Notice	The Border Watch
31/05/2026	Social Media	Facebook and Instagram story
01/06/2026	Radio	Triple M – radio interview
01/06/2026	Social Media	Facebook post
02/06/2026	Other	City of Mount Gambier Newsletter
05/06/2026	Radio	ABC South East – Radio Interview
07/06/2026	Social Media	Facebook and Instagram story
08/06/2026	Social media	Facebook post

Have Your Say Website - the Have Your Say Mount Gambier website provided links to the full Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget document, Draft Long Term Financial Plan, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and the submission form. The site was used as the primary method of consultation by Council to provide ease of access to the community and engagement statistics to be analysed by Council staff.

Council's Main Offices - the full Draft 2026/2027 ABP document and Draft LTFP was available for viewing at the following locations:

- Council's Customer Service Centre, Civic Centre, Watson Terrace; and
- Mount Gambier Library, Watson Terrace

Information Sessions – Two information sessions were held to allow members of the public to ask questions and provide feedback on the Draft ABP and LTFP. Printed versions of the documents were also made available to the public during these sessions.

- Session 1: 2 June 2026, 6:00pm, City Hall.
- Session 2: 3 June 2026, 12:00pm, City Hall.

Special Council Meeting - a special council meeting has been arranged pursuant with Section 123 of the Act on 16 June 2026 to enable the public to make verbal submissions regarding the Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget as part of the public consultation process.

FEEDBACK AND COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Have Your Say website consultation statistics – the site provided the opportunity for the community to consult on the Draft ABP and Draft LTFP. The statistics show that the community engaged in the following way:

- Aware participants: 156 – who visited at least one page
- Informed participants: 81 – who downloaded a document or visited multiple pages
- Engaged participants: 2 – who provided a digital submission.

Email correspondence - 10 emails were received from 5 individual community members or organisations. The email correspondence included comments, general feedback and comprised a number of questions. Direct email correspondence received in relation to the budget has been tabled in an attachment to this report.

Information Sessions – A total of 10 members of the public attended across the two information sessions provided (one person attended both sessions). This allowed an opportunity for direct questioning and feedback with elected members and members of Council's executive and management personnel.

- Session 1: 9 community members attended; 5 Elected Members (including Mayor) attended.
- Session 2: 2 community members attended; 2 Elected Members (including Mayor) attended.

Request for verbal submissions – Council has received requests from four (4) members of the public of their intent to present a verbal submission at the special meeting scheduled. Request for verbal submissions remained open until 5pm Thursday, 11 June 2026. Of the four (4) members of the public who registered to speak, three (3) will be attending. The three (3) members of public attending include:

- Mount Gambier Residents and Ratepayers Association
- G Walkom
- O le Roux

Summary of Submissions/Attendances

Information Sessions	Have Your Say Website	Email	Verbal Submission
11 attendances	2 submissions	10 submissions	4 requests, 3 attending

The public consultation process generated 12 submissions overall from 7 individual members or organisations of the public (refer Attachment) on the Draft Annual Business Plan and Draft

Long Term Financial Plan. Submissions have been included in the attachment to this report to ensure transparency.

It is noted that a significant number of questions were raised during the consultation process, with two individuals submitting more than 111 questions between them.

Submission Responses – All responses to submissions are tabled as an attachment to this report.

Submission Key Themes - The following themes are contained within the submissions received:

- Rate Increases and perceived affordability
- Wulanda financial performance
- ESCOSA review
- Service Reviews and discretionary services
- Asset Management and renewal expenditure
- Employee costs and organisational efficiency
- Waste Service Charges and collections
- Consultation process

Audit and Risk Committee Recommendations

At the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 3 June 2026, the Committee reviewed the Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget and Draft Long Term Financial Plan. The Audit and Risk Committee's recommendation is tabled below for ease of review and consideration as part of the entire feedback process.

Annual Business Plan and Budget

1. *That the Audit and Risk Committee report titled 'Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget' as presented on Wednesday 3 June 2026 be noted.*
2. *That the Audit and Risk Committee provides feedback on Council's Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget and/or the associated processes and risks, as follows:*

   • Acknowledge the balanced budget and the current economic uncertainty and note that Council is meeting all financial targets.

   • That the Audit and Risk Committee recommend use of Adelaide CPI in future iterations of the Annual Business Plan and Budget which is used by the majority of Councils in South Australia.

   And this feedback be incorporated with the public consultation feedback to be presented to Council for consideration before the adoption of the 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget.

Long Term Financial Plan

1. *That the Audit and Risk Committee report titled 'Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2027 to 2036 for Public Consultation' as presented on Wednesday 3 June 2026 be noted.*
2. *That the Audit and Risk Committee provides feedback on Council's Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2027-2036 and/or the associated processes and risks, as follows:*

   • Commend administration on the financial strategy and guiding principles contained in the Long Term Financial Plan.

   • Consider setting a target of operating surplus in future considerations of Long Term Financial Plans.

And this feedback be incorporated with the public consultation feedback to be presented to Council for consideration before the adoption of the Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2027-2036.

IMPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER

Legal	**Legislation** - Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1999 requires Council to have an Annual Business Plan and Budget. The Plan is Council's statement of its intended programs and outcomes for the year and the required contents of the document are laid out in Section 123 and the Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 2011.
Financial and Budget	The Draft budget is consistent with the Long Term Financial Plan and provides for sustainable service delivery.
Community Consultation and Engagement	The community consultation timelines and approach was aligned with the Local Government Act and Council's Policy Community Consultation and Engagement Policy P195. Community consultation is "part of community engagement and means a planned process by which the Council formally invites its constituents and stakeholders to comment about matters upon which Elected members are to deliberate."
Other Resources	Preparation of the draft Annual Business Plan and Budget has involved significant input from the Finance team in collaboration with Budget Managers, Media and Communications team and Executive Leadership Team. Additional staff resources have been allocated to facilitate consultation, respond to enquiries, and compile feedback for Council's consideration.

APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

This report aligns to the following strategic objectives(s):

Priority 6: Excellence in Leadership and Governance
6.4 Review and continually update the Long -Term Financial Plan to ensure ongoing financial sustainability to community expectations and legislative requirements.

This report contributes to delivery of the following key strategic project(s):

N/A

RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICY

Asset Accounting
Asset Management - A900
Budget Policy - B300
Community Consultation and Engagement - P195
Procurement
Rates - Rate Rebate - R155
Rates - Rating - R105
Treasury Management - T150

IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

1. Special Council Meeting 16 June 2026 to review public feedback and hear verbal submissions.
2. Special Council Meeting on 23 June 2026 or 30 June 2026 for the purpose of adopting the 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget and Long-Term Financial Plan.

CONCLUSION

Following a series of workshops, Council endorsed the 2026–27 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget for the purposes of public consultation.

A total of 12 submissions were received via the Have Your Say website and email. These submissions are included in, or attached to, this report for consideration by Elected Members.

Three individuals have indicated their intention to make verbal submissions in person at the Special Meeting scheduled for 16 June 2026.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Summary Public ~ Annual Business Plan and Budget and LTFP 2026 2027 [**5.1.1** - 3 pages]
2. Response to Written submission - Ockert le Roux [**5.1.2** - 11 pages]
3. Response to Written submission - G Walkom [**5.1.3** - 13 pages]
4. Oral Presentation outline - MGDRRA [**5.1.4** - 2 pages]

Name	Wish To Be Heard	Public Comments/Feedback/Questions	Administration comments/responses
B Agpasa		ABP& B - Yes, I think there will be inclusive key community services as funded by the Federal Government (it's been declared by July 1st 2026), our expanded services such as various radio stations (Flow FM is currently expanding it's network to more regions of south-east of South Australia and western Victoria), various TV stations (the free-to-air transmissions of WIN Nine Mount Gambier sold to the Nine Entertainment group, Channel 7 Mount Gambier sold to Southern Cross Media Group, and Channel 10 Mount Gambier sold to Paramount Australia and New Zealand, after WIN will end free-to-air broadcasts of Network 10 channels across Mount Gambier), NDIS and disability support, the service industries, regional economy, arts and culture and more, because of our services improved in line with both Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and Mount Gambier 2035, that was a good idea at all, thanks to Brendon Agpasa for your great contribution from interstate community visitor. It's the better future for success of interstate community in Mount Gambier, as with advocating for the inclusion of key community services went funded by the Federal Government. We have our services such as regional economy, local tourism, the service industries, key areas of local businesses, movies in cinema complex, NDIS and disability support, holiday trips and destinations to south-east SA, regional SA, Victoria and worldwide, various radio stations (Flow FM is currently expanding it's network to more regions of south-east of South Australia and western Victoria), various TV stations (the free-to-air transmissions of WIN Nine Mount Gambier sold to the Nine Entertainment group, Channel 7 Mount Gambier sold to Southern Cross Media Group, and Channel 10 Mount Gambier sold to Paramount Australia and New Zealand, after WIN will end free-to-air broadcasts of Network 10 channels across Mount Gambier), local community centres, arts and culture, sports, in line with both Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and Mount Gambier 2035 and many more. They'll be contributed by Brendon Agpasa as a community visitor from Melbourne in Victoria. LTFP - The local council has worked with State Government of South Australia, and Australian Federal Government will fund the better future of inclusive community services as the funding allocated was $36,000 over 10 year financial plan. The long-term financial plan for nearly $36,000 to expand our services such as regional economy, sports, radio stations, TV stations, NDIS and disability support and many more, up to 10 year plan.	This has been taken as a comment
J Stott		Why are the Councils consistently increasing the rates when the public have to pay for Council coffers	Council rates are not increased to build up 'coffers', but to fund the services and infrastructure the community relies on. Costs for delivering these services—such as road maintenance, waste collection, community facilities, and staff—continue to rise each year due to inflation, asset renewal needs, legislative requirements, and growing community expectations.
J Stott		A 5.9% increase is unsustainable for the residents of Mount Gambier. Council should be winding costs back instead of paying for Councils Coffers	This has been taken as a comment
G Walkom		In June 2025 council gave various assurances that it would meet the recommendations of the ESCOSA Report and publicly report annually on this implementation. Council also referenced the so called "Unlocking Projects" due for completion in the 25/26 Business Plan. Unlocking Projects Service Review Workforce Planning In particular, council assured the community that it has ".. acted quickly to align our forward planning with ESCOSA's recommendations. Importantly, this is an ongoing process. Council will review, measure, and publicly report on progress annually through both the Long-Term Financial Plan and the Annual Business Plan, as part of our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement." and that "Council is also underway with a service review and workforce planning project which will continue to refine services in accordance with community expectations and outcome measures." I did not find the status reports on the ESCOSA advice nor the promised updates on council's "Unlocking Projects" in the draft documents. Would you please provide this information to facilitate objective input to the 26/27 Business Plan and LTFP.	Email returned 03/06/2026 as follows: The matters referred to in your email of Tuesday 26 May 2026 are addressed in the draft 2026/27 Annual Business Plan (ABP) and Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP), particularly at: • ESCOSA advice (ABP p.84) and financial sustainability reporting (ABP pp.34–35; LTFP pp.25–30); • Service review and efficiency measures (ABP pp.6–8; LTFP pp.9, 13); and • Workforce planning (ABP pp.10, 24–25; LTFP p.13). The Council's financial sustainability has been independently confirmed by the Local Government Finance Authority. There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide a separate, or standalone, status or update report on the implementation of ESCOSA recommendations.

Name	Wish To Be Heard	Public Comments/Feedback/Questions	Administration comments/responses
G Walkom		I am reviewing the Draft ABP 26/27 and LTFP and find several references where it is "justified" to put rates up because Rates have not kept up with inflation, but I cannot readily compile a period of say 3 years where rates have not kept up on average over that 3 year period. Could you please advise actual CPI Vs CoMGC actual rate rises since 2018/19 through to DABP and LTFP 2026/27 (est)	The information requested in your email, including prior Annual Business Plans and Budgets, are publicly available on Council's website. Broader economic indicators, such as CPI, are also publicly available from established external sources such as Australian Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Australia to name a couple.
Mount Gambier Residents and Ratepayers Assoc. SA		Can you please advise where all the building waste from the demolition of 2 Sturt St went (?Caroline landfill?) and if there was full cost recovery as you indicated ratepayers have to shoulder in their waste? How much was deposited and what the charge to the developers was. Given the age of the bui9lding and modifications over the last 100 years can you confirm that there was no risk of asbestos contamination. Can you also include a comment on how much of this type of waste was deposited and the charges overall for the last 12 months. Can you also confirm that green waste is provided free of charge to BIOgro	All receival of waste is in accordance with the terms and conditions as set out in Council's EPA licence, and as per the endorsed fees and charges. Regarding the treatment and quantities of resources in relation to a private development at 2 Sturt street, I would suggest you contact the developer for this information. We are charged to dispose of FOGO at Bio Gro and the gate fee is subject to commercial confidentiality.
G Walkom		Further to your invite to lodge questions regarding the 26/27 Draft ABP I am compiling those questions but would appreciate some missing numbers. What are the Income and the expenses totals Estimated where not to the EoFY yet, I have a couple only year Income expend 23/24 ? ? 24/25 ? ? 25/26 2923est 6188 est 26/27 3094est 6764 est	This consultation relates specifically to the 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget, the questions raised fall outside this scope of this consultation.
N Clark		I have been a rate-paying homeowner in Mount Gambier since February 2017, when I purchased my home in [redacted] My current annual rates, including the proposed increase, are approximately $2686.00 Over the past nine years I have taken a keen interest in the Wulanda Recreation and Convention Centre project and the significant increases in its reported cost. Throughout this period, community concerns have frequently been raised regarding project management, transparency and the long-term financial implications for ratepayers. As a pensioner, I am increasingly concerned about rising rates and the perception that council services and infrastructure improvements have not kept pace to match those significant increases. While Council has advised that rate increases are not directly linked to Wulanda, many residents remain unconvinced and continue to seek greater transparency regarding the project's full financial impact. In my own area, I have sought relatively modest infrastructure improvements, including completion of a missing footpath connection that would provide a safer and more direct to the hospital. Despite representations made several years ago, this matter remains unresolved. Similar concerns are often expressed by residents across the city regarding local playgrounds, greening of reserves and neighbourhood infrastructure. It is therefore difficult for many ratepayers not to question whether the financial commitments associated with Wulanda have reduced Council's capacity to fund other community priorities. For this reason, I respectfully request clarification regarding several matters referred to in the Draft Business Plan, Budget and Long-Term Financial Plan. Clear answers to these questions would assist ratepayers in understanding the project's true cost and ongoing financial impact.	Thank you for your submission and feedback. This consultation relates specifically to the 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget, and some matters raised fall outside its scope. Wulanda has been operating since late 2022 and now forms part of Council's ongoing operations, with associated costs included in the draft Annual Business Plan and Budget (refer page 30) and provided in the question above. Like many services provided for the community, these costs contribute to overall revenue requirements, of which rates raises approx 63%. Council has also continued to improve transparency by providing detailed reporting on Wulanda within both Council reports and the Annual Business Plan and Budget. These are available on Council's website. The pool cover referenced forms part of a broader capital program, with the cover itself estimated at approximately $150,000. This investment is intended to improve efficiency, including reducing heating and maintenance costs and enhancing usability. There is currently no proposal to enclose the outdoor pool. Council is also progressing a Play Space Implementation Strategy, with funding allocated to ensure projects are ready for delivery. The outcomes of this work will inform which projects proceed in the coming year and beyond.

Name	Wish To Be Heard	Public Comments/Feedback/Questions	Administration comments/responses
		• Wulanda Car Park - Was the cost of the Wulanda car park and associated landscaping included within the project's reported total cost, or accounted for separately within Council's capital works program? • Wulanda Retaining Walls- Were the boundary retaining walls treated as part of the Wulanda project budget? If not, under which budget program were they funded? • Rate Increases-To what extent, if any, have loan repayments , operating costs and depreciation associated with Wulanda contributed to recent rate increases? • Community Confidence-Does Council acknowledge that ongoing costs revisions have affected public confidence in Council's financial management and project reporting? • Sound System - What was the total cost to Council of the sound system procured after the original contract was completed? Has the system delivered the expected operational and financial benefits? I ask this question because ratepayers are entitled to understand the value obtained from significant post-construction expenditure. • Pool Cover- Council has budgeted $332,000 for an outdoor pool cover. Given previous discussions regarding the possible future enclosure of the pool, has Council undertaken a cost-benefit analysis of this expenditure? Could Council provide the justification for this investment and explain how it aligns with any longer-term plans for the facility? • Practical Completion- At the date of Practical Completion for the Wulanda project, were any variations claims, disputes or unresolved contractual matters outstanding? If so, what were they and what was their estimated financial value? • Final Project Cost-What is Council's current estimate of total final cost of the Wulanda project, including all construction costs, variations, legal expenses, settlement payments, litigation costs and associated works completed after Practical Completion? If some of these costs have been allocated to other budgets or accounts, could Council identify them separately? • Lessons Learnt Report- Has Council considered commissioning and publicly releasing an independent "lessons learnt" review of the Wulanda project ? Such a review could help strengthenn public confidence and provide valuable guidance for future major Council projects.	answered above
		• Play Space Development- At the Council meeting of 20 April 2021, a deputation regarding playground provision in the Corriedale Park area was positively received. Given the current provision for a new or upgraded play space, can Council advise whether the needs identified by local families and residents have now been addressed particularly for children living in the northern part of the Corriedale Park area? Thank you for considering this submission. The questions raised above are intended to assist ratepayers in understanding the financial implications of major Council projects and the relationship between those projects, service delivery and future rate increases.	answered above
S Hodge		Making rubbish fortnightly isn't productive, people will just litter/dump rubbish. There is already an increase of this. I would keep weekly pick ups, and also add hard rubbish collections. Adelaide have them and they work really well. There needs to be a significant amount put into upgrading playgrounds and creating new recreation spaces in this town. I grew up here and moved to Adelaide, after 20 years I have returned, and its still the same playground! There should be public consultation onthe playspaces, there needs to be more to do in this town for youths. The kids need a small pump track, flying fox, bike track that is safe. Adelaide has recreation parks with all this plus sporting like bb court, skate park.	This has been taken as a comment
G Walkom	Yes	A submission containing 49 questions is separately included	Questions will be responded to in a separate document attached to the agenda, administration will respond to submissions as fully as possible within available timeframes, noting that some are extensive and require significant analysis.
O le Roux	Yes	A submission containing 62 questions is separately included	Questions will be responded to in a separate document attached to the agenda, administration will respond to submissions as fully as possible within available timeframes, noting that some are extensive and require significant analysis.
Mount Gambier Residents and Ratepayers Assoc. SA	Yes	provided a list of topics for their oral submission	

Council notes many matters raised are already addressed within the ABP and LTFP, several conclusions are based on partial interpretation, and some expectations extend beyond the purpose of strategic planning documents.

Council does not accept the overall characterisation that the plans fail to address key financial issues.

Written submission to the draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Long-Term Financial Plan

Regarding the City of Mount Gambier

Prepared and submitted by Ockert le Roux, resident of the City of Mount Gambier | 9 June 2026

Critical Budget Overview

The City of Mount Gambier (CoMTG) Draft 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget is being presented as balanced and sustainable, but the underlying trend over the past few years remains unchanged.

Council proposes total expenditure of $56.91 million, a 5.9% general rate revenue increase, plus a one-off 0.5% election cost-shift increase, while rateable assessment growth is only 1.37%. Rates now fund around 63% of Council income, and the Waste Service Charge is proposed to rise from $344 to $390 per applicable service.

The central issue is not whether the spreadsheet balances for one year. The real issue is whether CoMTG has made enough structural changes to reduce its reliance on ratepayers after the Wulanda debt shock, rising employee costs, asset renewal pressure, waste cost escalation, and above-CPI rate increases over many years.

ESCOSA has already warned that CoMTG's projected sustainability relied on community support for rate increases well above CPI. It recommended cost-saving targets, questioned the pace of Wulanda debt repayment, and told Council to review capital growth, depreciation assumptions, asset renewal funding, affordability and future rate increases.

The Draft 2026/2027 Budget and Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) are largely silent on the real issues. Little evidence is presented to demonstrate a genuine effort to change the city's financial position next year or at any point in the future.

1. Rates: affordability and above-CPI increases

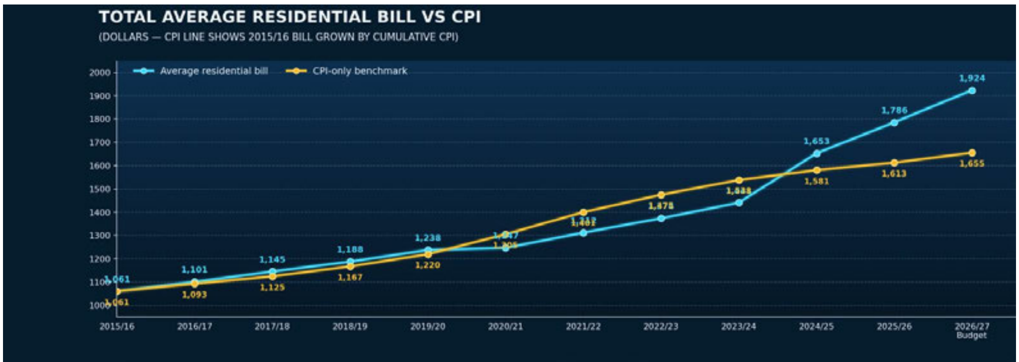
Critical point: Council continues to place the burden of financial recovery on ratepayers, rather than demonstrating a credible and disciplined internal savings program.

A 5.9% general rate revenue increase, plus a further 0.5% attributed to election cost shifting, sits well above ordinary household income growth and inflation expectations for many residents. Almost every household in our city has had to tighten its family budget as cost-of-living pressures continue to eat into disposable income year after year.

Yet CoMTG has shown little convincing evidence that it has made a comparable effort to reduce its own costs, find efficiencies, or ease the burden on the community. This is our hard-earned income, and it should not be treated as an automatic fallback whenever Council's financial position tightens.

Ratepayers expect Council to manage public money with the same discipline, restraint and care that households are forced to apply to their own budgets in difficult times.

Graph 1. Average residential rate trend



	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27 Budget
Residential bill ($)	1,061	1,101	1,145	1,188	1,238	1,247	1,312	1,374	1,441	1,653	1,786	1,924
CPI-only benchmark ($)	1,061	1,093	1,125	1,167	1,220	1,305	1,401	1,475	1,538	1,581	1,613	1,655
Gap above CPI ($)	0	8	20	21	18	-58	-89	-101	-97	72	173	269
CPI index	100	103	106	110	115	123	132	139	145	149	152	156

CoMTG continues to claim that Mount Gambier remains one of the lowest-rating cities in regional South Australia. That may once have been the case, but repeated above-inflation increases since 2023 have significantly weakened that claim. The question now is not whether Council was once comparatively low-rating, but whether it is becoming increasingly reliant on ratepayers to cover structural financial pressures that should have been addressed internally.

The 2026/2027 budget material quantifies the ratepayer burden, but not the internal savings effort.

ESCOSA recommended limiting future rate increases and improving affordability. What specific changes has Council made in this draft budget to reduce future ratepayer reliance?

Questions for Council:

1. What is the total dollar value of internal operating savings built into the 2026/2027 draft budget?

Savings are incorporated through the budget development process, including a bottom-up review of the 2025/2026 base budget. They are not presented as a single total.

2. Where are those savings shown line by line in the budget?

They are embedded across budget adjustments and not listed as a separate line item.

3. What services, programs, projects, contracts or staffing costs were reduced, deferred or removed to lower the rate burden?

Changes are incorporated across services and projects and reflected in the overall budget, not itemised in the format requested. Council did not seek to reduce services.

4. Has Council adopted an efficiency dividend or savings target for 2026/2027? If not, why not?

No formal efficiency dividend. Efficiency is addressed through ongoing reviews and budget processes.

5. What is the minimum rate increase Council could deliver if all non-essential discretionary projects were deferred for one year?

A lower rate scenario would require deferring services and capital works. Alternative scenarios are not published. The ABP confirms maintaining service delivery, meeting asset renewal requirements and responding to cost pressures.

6. Has Council quantified the cost of “careful resourcing”? If yes, what is the amount? If not, why is the phrase used without measurable evidence?

This is reflected in workforce planning and budget allocations, not as a standalone quantified item.

7. Over the last decade, Mount Gambier’s ratepayer base has grown only modestly, but the rate burden has grown sharply. The number of rateable properties increased by about 7%, while general rate revenue increased by more than 50%. That means the financial pressure has not been absorbed by growth; it has been pushed onto existing ratepayers. On a simple service-demand proxy, ratepayers are paying much more per property than they were 10 years ago. Why? This question was put to CoMTG at the meeting on 2 June 2026, but it was not adequately addressed.

The ABP specifically notes prior years of rates below cost growth, correction to support long-term sustainability and cost escalation from inflation over many years.
The simplified comparison in the question does not reflect these important factors.

2. Wulanda: the unresolved financial burden

Critical point: Wulanda remains the defining financial issue. It created debt, increased depreciation, increased operating costs and lifted Council’s fixed cost base. Council needs to stop describing Wulanda only as a community asset and provide a transparent full-cost account of its ongoing burden.

Questions for Council:

1. What is the full 2026/2027 budgeted cost of Wulanda, including operating subsidy, depreciation, interest, debt principal repayment, maintenance, utilities, staffing, insurance and lifecycle renewal allowance?

Contained in the ABP People, Place and Liveability section and Wulanda financial summary (including operating, depreciation and interest). The LTFP further confirms Wulanda is a long-life intergenerational asset and borrowing is used to spread costs fairly across generations.

2. What percentage of total Council expenditure does Wulanda now represent?

Not presented as a specific percentage, but Wulanda costs are clearly shown within portfolio financial tables and overall expenditure sections

3. What is Wulanda’s expected net operating result for 2026/2027 before depreciation and after depreciation?

Contained in the ABP financial information.

4. What was the original business-case estimate for Wulanda’s annual operating subsidy, and how does the current forecast compare?

Not presented in the format requested. Performance is monitored operationally.

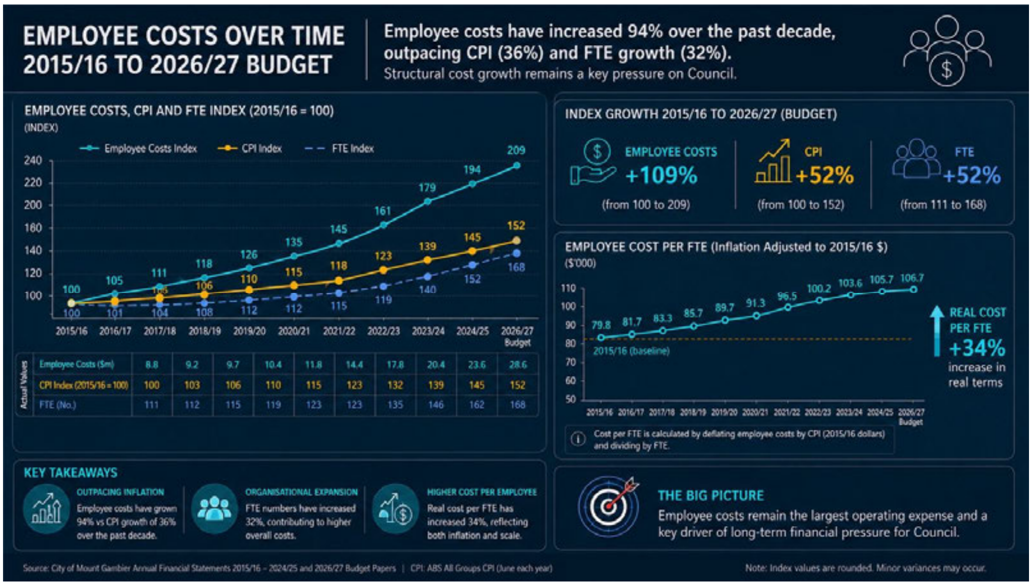
5. ESCOSA observed that the pace of Wulanda debt repayment may place an unnecessary burden on current ratepayers and suggested Council consider a longer repayment period because the asset is intergenerational. Has Council modelled alternative repayment periods, and will it publish the impact on annual rates, interest costs and intergenerational equity?

The LTFP confirms borrowing structure has been designed for intergenerational equity and debt is reducing over time.

3. Employee costs and organisational growth

Critical point: From below analysis, it shows employee costs have grown materially over the last decade and have remained a major share of total expenditure. The 2026/2027 budget needs to explain whether this is driven by genuine service demand or organisational expansion.

Graph 2. Employee costs and organisational growth



Questions for Council:

1. For each new or retained position above the 2020/2021 staffing base, what specific increase in service levels justifies the additional cost?

Not presented at individual position level. Staffing aligns with service delivery needs.

2. What percentage of total operating expenditure is represented by employee costs in the 2026/2027 budget? A preliminary benchmark across other Limestone Coast councils indicates that CoMTG's employee costs may be around 8–10% higher as a proportion of total operating expenditure.

Employee costs are included in financial statements; comparative benchmarking is not presented as suggested.

3. How many new positions are proposed in the 2026/2027 budget, and what is the total cost of these positions?

Workforce changes are included in budget allocations, not summarised separately.

4. Has Council previously undertaken an independent organisational efficiency review? If so, when will the findings be made public? If not, why has such a review not been commissioned?

Reviews and improvements occur through internal processes. Not all are published.

5. Has the Hub and Spoke model, introduced in July 2024, resulted in additional full-time equivalent positions? Has Council compared the cost and efficiency of this model against the previous concession model, as indicated in 2024? If so, what did that comparison reveal?

Under review. Outcomes not presented within the ABP format.

6. What is the 2025/26 forecasted spend on external consultants for the CoMTG and what was the budget provision for the 2026/27 year?

Included in overall expenditure. Not separately detailed.

7. ESCOSA specifically recommended that Council develop a plan to achieve cost-saving measures and targets. What dollar value of employment-related savings has been built into the 2026/2027 budget, and where are those savings shown line by line?

No standalone figure. Efficiencies are embedded in the LTFP and budget.

4. Asset renewal versus new projects

Critical point: ESCOSA highlighted Council to prioritise asset renewal and fully fund replacement before continuing with new and upgraded assets. This is important because new assets create future operating, maintenance, depreciation and renewal liabilities.

Questions for Council:

1. What is the 2026/2027 budget Asset Renewal Funding Ratio?

Clearly reported in ABP and LTFP.

2. What is the dollar value of asset renewal expenditure compared with required renewal under the Asset Management Plans?

LTFP confirms funding is at or above 100%, averaging ~123% over the plan.

3. Which projects in the draft budget are renewal, upgrade, new assets or discretionary strategic projects?

Included in the capital works program (renewal vs new/upgrade split provided).

4. What future operating and maintenance costs will be created by each new or upgraded asset?

Lifecycle costs are considered and included in planning.

5. Has Council deferred any renewal work to fund new initiatives? If yes, list the deferred projects and risk ratings.

No. Both ABP and LTFP confirm renewal is prioritised.

6. What assets are currently below acceptable service condition, and what is the cost to bring them back to standard?

Managed through Asset Management Plans. Not reported in detail in the ABP.

5. Capital program transparency

Critical point: ESCOSA specifically recommended that Council disclose material changes to capital expenditure forecasts in the annual LTFP update. That means Council should clearly explain what changed, why it changed and what ratepayers are now expected to fund.

Questions for Council:

1. What are the material changes between the previous LTFP and the new Draft LTFP 2027–2036?

6. Summarised in the LTFP Key Changes section.

1. For each material capital change, will Council provide the previous forecast, new forecast, dollar movement, reason for movement, funding source, impact on debt and impact on rates?

Summarised in the LTFP Key Changes section.

2. Which capital projects have been added, removed, deferred or increased?

Not provided in the format requested.

3. Which capital projects are dependent on grants that are not yet secured?

Reflected within updated capital programs.

4. Will Council publish a capital project risk register showing cost escalation, grant dependency and delivery risk?

No. Risks noted in LTFP.

7. Waste Service Charge increase

Critical point: The Waste Service Charge increase from $344 to $390 is significant and should be justified with a transparent cost-recovery calculation, not broad references to EPA levies, fuel and regulation.

Questions for Council:

1. What is the full cost model behind the Waste Service Charge increase?

Explained in ABP and LTFP, including inflation, regulatory requirements, infrastructure and full cost recovery.

2. How much of the $46 increase is due to kerbside collection, disposal, EPA levy, fuel, staffing, contract escalation, landfill leachate works and transfer station operations?

Not presented in the requested format.

3. Is the Waste Service Charge collecting only the cost of waste services, or is it cross-subsidising other Council activities?

No. The charge is explicitly designed to achieve cost recovery within the City of Mount Gambier collections.

4. Do any other councils in South Australia or Victoria bring waste into the CoMTG landfill under contract? If so, does this cross-subsidise other councils or is cost recovered in full?

Yes, managed under cost recovery principles. Gate fees are published annually.

5. What efficiency measures have been applied to waste operations before increasing the charge?

Addressed through the Waste Master Plan and operational improvements.

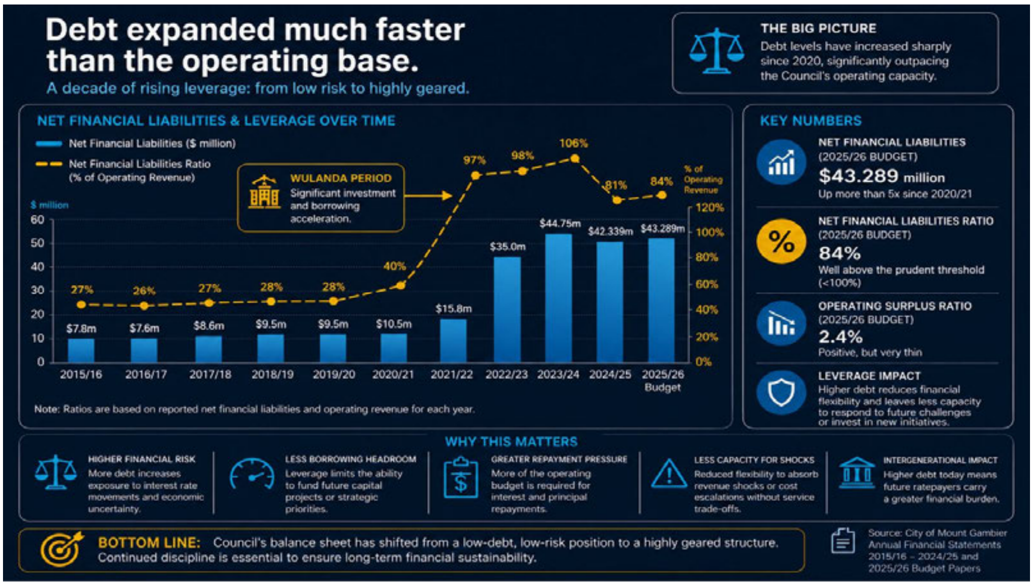
6. What is the projected Waste Service Charge over the next 10 years under the LTFP?

Included in LTFP assumptions.

8. Debt and intergenerational equity

Critical point: Council's debt position should be explained in plain language. At the recent budget meeting on 2 June, Councillor Paul Jenner referred to "good debt". There is no such thing as good debt when it expands faster than the operating base. Graph 3 shows the impact of Wulanda on debt and the high Net Financial Liabilities Ratio, which peaked at 106% in 2023/2024. Ratepayers need to understand how much debt remains, how much is Wulanda-related, and whether current residents are being asked to repay an intergenerational asset too quickly. We also need to understand how this debt burden will affect future borrowings and limit expansion in years to come.

Graph 3. Debt and Net Financial Liabilities Ratio



Questions for Council:

1. What are the projected total borrowings at 30 June 2027?

All detailed in the LTFP Borrowings and Financial Indicators sections.

2. How much of that debt is directly attributable to Wulanda?

All detailed in the LTFP Borrowings and Financial Indicators sections.

3. What is the 2026/2027 budgeted interest expense?

All detailed in the LTFP Borrowings and Financial Indicators sections.

4. What is the 2026/2027 principal repayment?

All detailed in the LTFP Borrowings and Financial Indicators sections.

5. What is the Net Financial Liabilities Ratio for 2026/2027 and each year of the LTFP?

All detailed in the LTFP Borrowings and Financial Indicators sections.

6. Has Council modelled a slower Wulanda debt repayment scenario, as ESCOSA suggested? If yes, publish the model. If not, why not?

Not published. Current approach reflects intergenerational equity principles.

7. What other ideas have been explored to deal with the Wulanda debt or the future of this asset?

Financial strategy includes active debt management and refinancing.

9. Service levels and value for money

Critical point: A key question is whether ratepayers are receiving proportionally better services for the increased revenue, staffing and debt burden. There is a general perception among ratepayers that service levels have deteriorated over time. Rate increases should be connected to measurable service outcomes.

Questions for Council:

1. What measurable service-level improvements will residents receive from the 2026/2027 budget?

Outlined in ABP Strategic Framework and Measures of Success.

2. Which services have improved since 2015, and how is that measured?

Not presented in this format.

3. Which services have declined or remained static despite higher rates?

No evidence provided. Assertion not supported by plans.

10. Strategic projects versus core obligations

Critical point: The draft budget lists many strategic and policy projects, including cultural heritage planning, play planning, live music development, business systems, wayfinding, reconciliation planning, engagement frameworks and master planning. Some may be worthwhile, but Council must explain why these should proceed while ratepayers face sustained increases.

Questions for Council:

1. Which 2026/2027 projects are legally required, and which are discretionary?

Not categorised in this format. Projects aligned to the strategic priorities of Council.

2. What is the total cost of all discretionary strategic projects in the budget?

Not grouped separately.

3. Which projects could be deferred for one year to reduce the rate increase?

Considered internally. Not listed publicly.

4. What is the minimum rate increase possible if Council funded only core services, asset renewal and unavoidable contractual obligations?

Not modelled.

5. Why has Council not presented the community with alternative budget scenarios, such as a base case, lower-rate option, asset-renewal-only option or service-reduction option?

Council determined the draft budget for consultation in consideration of its desired level of service, LTFP's and strategic priorities.

11. Accountability for ESCOSA recommendations

Critical point: Council should provide a formal public response to every ESCOSA recommendation, not simply say the budget "aligns" with the LTFP and strategic plans.

Questions for Council:

1. For each ESCOSA recommendation, what action has Council taken?

Actions are embedded across the ABP and LTFP, not tracked individually.

2. What remains incomplete?

Actions are embedded across the ABP and LTFP, not tracked individually.

3. Who is responsible for delivering each action?

Actions are embedded across the ABP and LTFP, not tracked individually.

4. What is the deadline?

Actions are embedded across the ABP and LTFP, not tracked individually.

5. Where in the 2026/2027 budget or LTFP can the community see the financial impact of each action?

Reflected through financial indicators, asset funding levels and operating results

6. Will Council publish an annual ESCOSA recommendation tracker?

No

12. Consultation and democratic accountability

Critical point: The consultation window is short, technical and difficult for ordinary ratepayers to interrogate properly. Written submissions close at 5:00 pm Thursday 11 June 2026, and verbal submissions are scheduled for Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 5:00 pm, with each speaker allocated five minutes.

Questions for Council:

1. Will Council provide written answers to public questions before adoption?

Council will provide written responses to submissions to the extent reasonably practicable within the available timeframe. It is noted that a significant number of questions raised are already addressed within the ABP and LTFP.

2. Will all written submissions be published in full, subject only to privacy redactions?

Submissions will be managed and published in accordance with governance, legislative and privacy requirements.

3. Will Council publish a consolidated question-and-answer document before the adoption meeting?

Council will determine the most appropriate format for responding to submissions.

4. Will Councillors be given enough time to review public submissions before voting?

Councillors are provided with submissions and supporting information through established governance processes prior to decision-making.

5. Why is the verbal submission meeting limited to one hour when the budget and LTFP affect every ratepayer for the next decade?

Meeting timeframes are set to balance community participation with statutory requirements and the overall adoption process.

Conclusion

The 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan and Budget should not be assessed merely on whether it balances for one year. It should be assessed on whether it genuinely changes the financial trajectory of the City of Mount Gambier.

At present, the draft appears to continue the same pattern: higher rates, higher charges, limited operating buffer, continuing Wulanda pressure and insufficient public evidence of structural cost savings.

Before adoption, Council should provide clear written answers to the questions above and demonstrate where the budget materially responds to ESCOSA's recommendations on cost control, debt repayment, asset renewal, capital discipline and ratepayer affordability.

Council notes that responding to submissions of this volume and length requires significant staff time and resources, a number of questions repeat matters already addressed in the ABP and LTFP and some commentary included in the submission is not relevant to the matters being considered

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Responses have been provided to the extent reasonably practicable, noting the volume and level of detail in the submission."

The CEO
Mount Gambier City Council

June 2026

Thank you for your specific invitation to submit formal questions on this year's Draft Business Plan rather than to discuss the Q&A process quality generally with you.

My apologies for some lengthy questions and also for some being similar but please appreciate I am seeking to clarify a point of enquiry and the context rather than deliberately asking a question twice: the ABP is not a concise document.

Encapsulating my overview of the ABP budget and LTFP I would make the following nutshell observations on the Business and LTFP for this year:

Pros:
- Budget proper -(except for excluding casuals in the FTE count);
- CBD Review
- Master planning
- Playgrounds
- Signage

Cons
- Priority Work Plan Projects - Extremely poor progress
- Total failure to follow through on ESCOSA recommendations
- Poor community consultations
- Poor management of waste services - $$$
- Assumptions for asset conditions

It is disappointing that council was unable or unwilling to supply the information I requested on the two significant discretionary services Wulanda and The Mt Gambier Library. My questions there are somewhat incomplete as a result.

Thank you,

G Walkom

Graham Walkom
[redacted] for any clarification needed

reference article:

Link: https://www.govpilot.com/blog/how-to-embrace-citizen-feedback-to-improve-government-operations

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions" - Lorber

That only 20 in 2025 and circa 12 in 2026 attend council's well publicised Q&A session about its Draft Business Plan is alarming.

But there were 93 formal concerns and questions submitted, most being in writing outside the June 2025 meetings.

Council's effectiveness at answering deteriorated significantly from the previous year 2024. The Mount Gambier and Districts Residents and Ratepayers Association (MGDRRA) of which I was chair at the time took issue with council's evasiveness and questionable integrity around the answers and formally reviewed the relevance of the answers provided by council. Of the 93 questions put,

a) only 12 of the total 93 questions were answered well

b) 22 of the 93 questions were answered in part only, and

c) 59 of the 93 questions were not answered objectively or at all.

12 out of 93? That is 13%!

This year the meetings may have been more amiable and interactive… perhaps because of the new CEO, perhaps because an election is looming.

I went to both sessions, 2 June 2026 and 3 June 2006, but because I attempted to ask the finance manager a finance question on 2 June after Mayor Martin rang the "end of gathering bell" and that is not allowed; I had to traipse back the next day to ask again. This time a much more expansive version of the same questions regarding, service subsidies to Wulanda and to our library; about the missing service reviews and about council's insistence on repeatedly drawing our attention to our rates being lower than some other councils, perhaps indicating that we needed to catch up that 25%. The CEO assured me that was not the intent but Cllr Jenner didn't necessarily agree so watch out for a 25% hike if you re-elect Cllr Jenner

To update myself on current best practice on effective feedback I came across the article I have listed above………wow! If only! I will relist the link here

https://www.govpilot.com/blog/how-to-embrace-citizen-feedback-to-improve-government-operations

The Draft Annual Business Plan is a most convoluted document and begs a lot of questions just to understand it. My questions for this year follow. Some have clarification context with them, each specific question I am asking to be objectively answered is in colour and bold.

a most convoluted business plan

Q1 **Has council noticed that the February 2025 ESCOSA report that reviewed council's performance and sustainability risks over a period of some twenty years gave a poor assessment of this council's performance when it came to our financial sustainability?** In fact it was marginal at best. But council see it as quite good and dispute marginal. I guess that is why ESCOSA provide a measuring gauge at the front of the report: it is clearly circa 52% and very obviously marginal.

Over a 20 year focus (10 past and 10 forward looking years) the ESCOSA report is a simple, concise plain english document that reviewed and reported on much of what council puts in its tedious, repetitive, convoluted Draft Annual Business Plans and the ESCOSA report does not need a doctorate to understand it. **Please can we have future Business Plans in this ESCOSA format - 26 pages instead of 83?** We Gambyites are low socio-economic types with moderate education - not academics.

The current ABP meets legislative and sector requirements.
It is based on the 2025/26 format which received positive feedback.
Characterisation of "poor" or "marginal" performance is interpretive and not Council's stated position.

Q2 Incidentally council previously published an Annual Business Plan Summary which in 21/22 was a great means of 'nutshell' community communication -only 4 pages but back in 21/22 packed with concise but relevant information. But then, but then… the quality faded quite radically and 24/25 was the last annual summary. **Can we please have the 21/22 version back and issued as a draft with the DABP and LTFP for community consultation?**

**A summary is provided annually.
This is distributed with rates notices and available online.**

Q3 Without your answer waxing lyrical about LGA and other guidelines, **Does council's CEO have any aspirations to streamline council's Annual Business Plans and associated documents with plain, concise language and format that residents can understand?**

Yes, continuous improvement in communication is ongoing with a focus on being concise, however balance is required with legislative obligations.

Q4 **Does council's CEO understand and could he personally advise just where the latest convoluted and complex 26/27 Draft Business Plan is pitched because to seriously suggest that it is a meaningful and effective communication with council's 28,000 residents on council's intended business over this next year is patently absurd?** The LocalGovernment Act does not require a convoluted Business Plan.

The ABP is designed to meet statutory requirements and provide transparency. The statement describing the document as "absurd" is not accepted.

Q5 **Does the CEO believe the current consultation process is effective in involving and engaging with the community in such an important planning document and direction finding community event?**

Yes - refer to ABP Public Consultation section. Council considers multiple engagement channels effective. In line with previous years a public consultation report is prepared outlining details of the consultation and participation as part of the special public meeting where verbal submissions are heard

Q6 **Could council please describe how it ensured the majority of residents were kept informed with mail-outs, surveys, progress reports, and feedback <u>during</u> the development of the Draft ABP and how effective were those methods?**

Outlined in ABP Public Consultation section including online and in-person engagement.

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Q7 **With just 20 people attending the two one hour sessions, what message from last year's community consultation meetings did council take away and apply to this year's meetings?**

a) **Is it that its communication effectiveness could be vastly improved?**

b) **Or did councillors and staff who attended last year and resolutely and arrogantly walked from the room after exactly the 60 minutes mandated time take the view: 'There is nothing our community can tell us'?**

Atendance is not sole engagement indicator. **Characterisation that councillor and staff behaviour as "arrogant" is rejected.**

Q8 **Indeed what is the message from this year with only circa 12 attending across both meetings.**

Council reiterates multiple participation channels beyond physical attendance

Q9 **Of the many submissions and questions put to council over the draft 24/25, and 25/26 consultations, what relevant changes were made to either the ABPlan or LTFPlan of that year?**

- In line with previous years a public consultation report is prepared outlining details of the consultation and participation as part of the special public meeting where verbal submissions are heard

Please refer to the Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held 24 June 2025 which lists changes of the previous documents

Q10 **Does council accept that references to recent past events and data are often contextually relevant to questions about the proposed Business Plan consultations and that questions with such references should not be disregarded?**

Where relevant and appropriate, historical data is useful.

Q11 **How does council regard the feedback best practice article by Stephen Brandofino? Does council see its current Business Plan community consultations can be improved and where on a 1-10 scale would council rate itself against the article's suggestions?**

Council continuously reviews engagement practices. **Self-rating is not required.**

An unreliable LTFP

Council claims:

"The draft Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) for 2026–2035 has been prepared to guide the financial decision-making and planning of Council over the next ten years. The LTFP is an essential component of Council's strategic management plans and is reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant to the evolving needs of the community and organisation."

Q12 **As an "essential component" how does council gets the rate adjustment forecasts so wrong so often: in fact reliably gets it wrong?**

The LTFP appears little more than a means to forecast never to be realised lesser rate increases and

Financial Indicators.
It is hard to dismiss the theory that councillors too easily approve yet another significant rate rise taking solace in their "forecast" lower rate rises in future years, much like the pub in New Orleans that for decades has been promising "Free crawfish pie tomorrow."

Forecasts have generally been at least double the increases ESCOSA say should be applied for our circumstances and community. Forecasting for the same years 26/27 to 33/35, the 2026 LTFP has a projected average rate increase of +4.4% year on year average rise but now 2027 LTFP drops to +2.8%, much nearer projected CPI. and near what ESCOSA says ratepayers can afford but who believes council with its routine failure to adhere to its own promises in this regard.

The LTFP is a forecast, updated annually in accordance with legislation. Variations reflect changing assumptions, financial climate, and priorities, not mismanagement.

Q13 **Does council believe it will adhere to its forecasts made in this Draft Annual Business Plan?**

What ratepayers have had to wear over the last 3 years, general rate listed first, then waste rate. Bold type = adopted, then council forecast is +25% general rate and (assuming you adopt the 26/27 draft numbers) and +68% in waste rates.

24/25LTP: +**10.1%** ,**43.9%** 25/26: +8.35%, +20.0% 26/27:+4.5% +5.0% 27/28: +4.5, +4.5.
25/26LTP: +**8.2%** , **10.6%** 26/27: +4.5%, +5.3% 27/28: +4.3% +5.3%, 28/29, +4.0%, 5.2%
26/27LTP: +**6.4**%, **13.4%** 27/28: +4.7%, 5.2% 28/29:+3.6%, 5.1% 29/30: 3.4%, 5.0%.

As above

Q14 **Does council expect ratepayers to have confidence in council's financial management when council has so consistently underestimated and understated future rate rises? How is this repeated under estimation and erratic forecasting explained?**

Yes. The assertion of "consistent underestimation" is misleading. The LTFP is a forecasting tool, updated annually to reflect changing economic conditions, service needs and improved data.
Variations between forecast and actual outcomes reflect responsive financial planning, not mismanagement.

Unreliable expenditure controls

Q15 **Is it unreasonable for ratepayers to opine that council is a poor manager of expenses and services and therefore reverts each year to unnecessary annual rate increases?**

Please do not wax lyrical in response here with references to Inflation, govt cost shifting, material cost increases and necessary assumptions that change - everyone must deal with these routine influences but they do not have the sheer luxury of raising rates as council does: they have to cut expenses and work smarter.

Council does not accept the assertion of "poor management".
Cost drivers are clearly outlined in the ABP Key Budget Influences and LTFP Significant Influences.
Dismissing inflation and cost pressures as a key financial driver is not realistic.

Q16 **So, 25% general rate rise in 3 years, and 68% waste rate rise in the same 3 years? The casual observer of council would suppose council has noticed these very poor results and decided to review its operations with the actions identified at Q43 and Q44. Is council at all concerned that it will soon hand over to a new council with such poor financial control?**

No

Q17 **Do you agree council must objectively and effectively review its operational effectiveness and spending and not just keep saying that it will?**

The excessive blowout in waste rate increases begs a couple of specific questions.

Yes — Council agrees that it is essential to continuously review operational effectiveness and expenditure.

This is already occurring and is reflected in the LTFP Financial Strategy and Guiding Principles

The assertion that Council is "just saying it will" is not accepted. These are multi-year programs that are actively underway, not unfulfilled commitments.

In relation to waste costs, increases are clearly explained in the ABP, including cost drivers such as regulatory requirements, infrastructure needs and the transition to full cost recovery.

Q18 **Has council taken administrative action to review the competency of management of waste services? The huge rate increases scream major problems?**

Reviews are ongoing across many service areas. Waste costs reflect regulatory, infrastructure, and cost-recovery factors.

Q19 **What were the adverse cost outcomes of the overfilling a cell at the Caroline Landfill a few years back? Was mismanagement a factor here also?**

No evidence to support a claim of "mismanagement"

Q20 **a) For the 23/24, 24/25, 25/26 years and 26/27 (forecast) and including all OpEx and CapEx costs for collection and landfill management what are the forecast costs per bin for collection (bin lift costs) for 2026?**

c) Please also advise the total annual cost for each bin type?

Detailed per-bin costing and operational breakdowns are not presented in the ABP or LTFP
These are operational-level data
Waste Service Charge is reflective of the costs to provide the service.

Q21 **I note the forecast kerbside waste and recycling collection and disposal in the 21/22 budget was $2.4m, for this new year 26/27, it is $5.7m. has council considered selling?:**

No

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Q22 **Is council concerned about the clear indications that council's failures in the areas of expense and services control are material in nature?**

Council does not accept the assertion that there are failures in expense or service control.
Expenditure and service delivery are actively managed and are clearly outlined in the ABP and LTFP, including identified cost pressures and planned responses.
Financial sustainability indicators remain within policy targets, demonstrating that Council is operating within an appropriate and controlled financial framework.

Q23 Focussing on the discretionary services that council has full control of, specifically and stated with particularity, **what discretionary services with their annual costs does council provide to this community? What are the value for money assessments/ratings for each, and how has the value for money assessment for each been measured?**

Council services are outlined in the ABP Our Organisation and Service Functions sections.
Costs are included within portfolio budgets, not itemised by individual service.
Value for money is assessed through budget processes, service reviews and performance measures in the ABP Strategic Framework. There is no single rating applied per service.

Q24 **Does council actually know what discretionary services council provides and their annual costs over the past two years 24/25 and 25/26; and 26/27 estimated.**

Yes. Council maintains records of services delivered and associated costs through its financial systems and budgeting processes, which inform the ABP and LTFP.

Q25 In last year's DABP Q&A very specifically asked what the "Service Review Framework"was/is. Your response "The Service Review Framework will define, catalogue and apply metrics to each service identified. It will include both mandatory and discretionary services".
The core issue though is that your business plan further stated that a KPI was to deliver that report by the end of the 25/26 Business Plan year which logically means **a complying discretionary list must be added to this Draft Annual Business Plan as a finished report. Will that happen or not?**

No. This is a large and complex piece of work; this is underway and progressing in the context of available resources and priorities. The suggestion that no progress has been made is not supported.

Q26 I cite the Mt Gambier library as one significant discretionary service about which there is little relevant performance data available. Council contributes circa $2,600,000 to its operation. From the Mt Gambier Council's annual report there are 290,000 loans (all types) plus some additional "programs" provided across the greater Mt Gambier area. I have asked for reliable operational data for the library to no avail, but indicatively, the cost of operations is $8.90 per loan - the cost of a book? That is alarming. **Does council agree that $8.90/loan indicates why ascertaining value for money is an essential to know metric?**

Cost-per-loan comparison presented is does not reflect the full-service offering (programs, access, community benefit).
Council does not consider a loan metric as a valid measure of value.

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Q27 I do note the improvement in council's listings of some services under the various Infrastructure and Services groups this year (pp29-31) compared to previous, but **PLEASE can we have the discretionary services separately grouped in THIS Year's ABP as a basic start to knowing what council is trying to do?**

The vagueness around this matter has gone on far too long and missed far too many promised deadlines attempting to sort it out.

The last list of costed discretionary services appears to have been in the 2019 Annual Business Plan.

The last readily accessible list of some of council's discretionary services is that in the 2021/22 Annual Business Plan "I quote from that summary:"

" In response to community needs, Council also provides many discretionary services, programs and support. **These include but are not limited to:**

- Animal control
- Community development and engagement
- Environmental health
- Event support
- Sport and recreation facilities
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Sponsorship and community grants
- Cemeteries
- Building and planning regulation
- Economic development
- Environmental sustainability initiatives
- Riddoch Art and Cultural Centre
- Tourism and visitor services
- Library programs and services
- Free public WiFi
- Youth programs."

Services are outlined across the ABP - Our Organisation and Service Functions sections. Council does not currently present services as a separately grouped list of "discretionary services" within the ABP.
The characterisation of "missed deadlines" and "vagueness" is not accepted. These are multi-year improvement projects and continue to progress as planned.

Q28 **Does council have even a basic but complete list and description of its discretionary services?**

Council maintains internal records identifying services and their functions, which inform budgeting, reporting and the preparation of the ABP and LTFP.

Q29 **Does council report on all service outcomes in a way that this community can appreciate and relate to council's actual performance? Surely this should be high priority and routine?**

Council reports service outcomes through the ABP Strategic Framework, objectives and measures of success, which outline planned outputs and priorities.
Reporting is at a strategic level rather than detailed, service-by-service performance metrics.

Q30 **Does council report on the cost of our many discretionary services once they are identified so ratepayers can see how efficiently the services are being delivered?**

Council does not report costs for individual discretionary services in the format described.
Costs are included at a portfolio and program level within the ABP financial statements, rather than itemised service-by-service.

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Q31 **Does council report on how it determines value for money for services and what council uses to measure value for money for comparison purposes?**

Council outlines its approach to value for money at a principles level in the LTFP Financial Strategy and Guiding Principles, including "Value for Money and Efficient Service Delivery".
There is no single published methodology or comparative metric used to rate value for money across all services in the format suggested.

Q32 **Does council report targets to demonstrate what a service is striving for?**

Yes.
Service targets and intended outcomes are outlined in the ABP Strategic Framework, objectives and measures of success, which describe what services are aiming to achieve over the year. These are presented at a strategic level rather than detailed, service-by-service operational targets.

the promised ESCOSA implementation reports are missing!

Q33 **ESCOSA provided council its assessment in February 2O25. Specifically what aspects of that report has council implemented to date? Can council please clearly quantify progress against each recommendation from 1 to 6 inclusive and the completion date.**

Council has considered the ESCOSA advice and built the relevant actions into its planning and financial approach.
You can see this reflected throughout the ABP and LTFP, particularly in the Financial Strategy, Key Changes and Guiding Principles sections.
Council does not present a detailed checklist or tracker showing each recommendation with progress and completion dates.
Instead, the actions are built into the way Council plans, budgets and reports each year, and will continue to be updated as part of that process.

Q34 **Does council agree with this ESCOSA assessment?** "*The Essential Services Commission finds the City of Mount Gambier's historical, current and projected financial performance mostly sustainable. This takes into account the Council's completion of the Wulanda Recreation and Convention Centre in 2022, a significant infrastructure project for the community, and planned average rate increases of 4.8 percent per property over the next 10 years (well above forecast CPI of 2.6 percent per annum). There are some risks for ratepayer affordability if operating costs are not constrained through a strategic approach to efficiency and savings initiatives. Asset sustainability risks may also emerge if past asset management planning practices of potentially under-funding asset renewal and replacement continue."*

The assessment highlights both positives and risks, and Council is aware of these and is actively working to manage them through ongoing planning and improvements.

Q35 **And does council agree with the ESCOSA assessment?**

"RISKS IMPACTING SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability is dependent upon rates growth well above CPI.

Constraint in the level of operating expenses is needed to ensure affordability risks are minimised. Proposed further investment in new and upgraded assets will create a stream of future renewal requirements (including repairs and maintenance) that will increase ongoing costs.

Not prioritising the renewal of its assets, which may increase asset sustainability risks or result in lower service levels to its community. " ?

Council acknowledges these risks identified by ESCOSA.

Q36 **Has council complied wth this ESCOSA assessment Q35? And where in the ABP and LTFP are the reports required by council's self imposed promise to be produced there?**
neither the LTFP nor the DABP have any such reports.

> *2. "**Develop a plan** to achieve cost savings measures and targets and report annually in the budget and the Long-Term Financial Plan as appropriate, to provide evidence of controlling the growth in costs and achieving efficiencies across its operations and service delivery."*

Council has considered the ESCOSA advice and built the relevant actions into its planning and financial framework. There is no requirement to 'comply' within the legislation.
Council does not present a separate cost savings plan or a detailed checklist showing progress against each recommendation.
Instead, the response to ESCOSA is built into the way Council plans, budgets and reviews its services each year, as outlined in the LTFP.
The suggestion that no action has been taken is not accurate.

Q37 The 26/27 ABP appears to indicate (again this year as it did last year) that council should update its Asset Management Plans and Depreciation Schedules to get accurate expenditure forecasts. The LTFP states there its a significant risk by relying on the assumptions it does rather than finalised data for depreciation and renewal funding being accurate. This matter has been restated several times in recent reports. **When will the Asset Management Plans be completed and not rely on assumptions?** (Rhetorical Qs: What is the adage about assuming? What's the adage about out of sight?)

ESCOSA clearly agrees

> *4."Review its depreciation assumptions and the underlying valuations and useful life data to ensure that depreciation accurately reflects the rate of asset consumption and ensure that asset renewal and replacement is fully funded."*

The current position is set out in the LTFP Risks section, which clearly explains that some asset data and depreciation assumptions are still being updated.
It reflects detailed and ongoing work, including condition assessments, asset revaluations, improving how assets are grouped and how their useful life is measured.
These are large, complex pieces of work and are being completed over several years.
Assumptions are standard in long-term planning and are disclosed in the LTFP.

Q38 **How can council be making realistic rate increase forecasts and accurate financial indicators if the asset register and depreciation schedule are likely inaccurate because they are based on assumptions, as the LTFP clearly states under 'risks'?**

Council's forecasts and financial indicators are based on the best available data and recognised assumptions at the time of preparation.
As outlined in the LTFP Risks section, the use of assumptions is explicitly disclosed to ensure transparency where asset data is still being refined.
It is not correct to suggest that this renders forecasts or indicators unreliable. Financial indicators are supported by established methodologies, aligned with Treasury Management Policy targets and regularly reviewed and updated as improved asset data becomes available.
Work to improve asset information is ongoing through the asset management program, as outlined in the ABP and LTFP.
As stated, the use of assumptions in long-term financial planning is standard practice, particularly where large and complex asset portfolios are involved.
The implication that financial indicators are "inaccurate" is therefore not correct.

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Q39 **Has Council complied with this further recommendation of ESCOSA?**

5 "Review its pace of development of new and upgraded assets, having regard to rates affordability, the affordability of the stream of future liabilities created by new and upgraded assets and the need to prioritise and fully fund asset renewal and replacement.

Council has considered this ESCOSA recommendation and incorporated it into its planning approach, (there is no requirement 'to comply'). This is reflected in the LTFP Guiding Principles and Capital Expenditure sections, which clearly state that asset renewal is prioritised ahead of new investment, lifecycle costs are considered for new and upgraded assets and borrowing and capital investment decisions are aligned with long-term affordability
The capital program and forward planning demonstrate that renewal funding meets or exceeds Asset Management Plan requirements and new projects are staged and assessed within financial capacity.
Council therefore does not accept that this recommendation has not been addressed. It has been embedded within the structure and principles of the ABP and LTFP, rather than presented as a separate standalone report.

Q40 **And receiving this further advice from ESCOSA, 16 months back, what actions complying with this advice have occurred?**

*6. "Review its approach to addressing financial sustainability risks, **in consultation with its community**, with a view to limiting future increases in rates and improving affordability for ratepayers."*

Council has considered this ESCOSA recommendation (there is no requirement 'to comply') and built it into its ongoing financial planning and community engagement approach. You can see this reflected in the ABP Public Consultation section, the LTFP Financial Strategy and Rate Strategy sections and the LTFP Guiding Principles. These show that: the community is consulted each year through the ABP process.
Council does not present this as a separate "review report", as the actions are built into its normal planning and decision-making processes.
The suggestion that no action has been taken is not supported.

Q41 **The fact that ESCOSA's advice is 16 months past, and many in the community appear to believe full compliance with their review is essential for this community to regain confidence in council's financial performance and service delivery, what on a self assessed basis would change in an updated ESCOSA report at the end of the proposed 2026/27 Annual Business Plan implementation?** ie a mid term self assessment ESCOSA report update.

Council does not undertake or publish a formal "self-assessment" ESCOSA update outside of the scheme's defined review process.

Q42 **Does council consider it reasonable that this suggested update (Q41) of the ESCOSA Report should be provided within the ABP26/27 because of repeated assurances that council has given when answering the question in the 2025/26 community consultations in June last year's Q&A on the intended commitment to implement the ESCOSA report.viz**.

The Question was:

"Does council propose to follow all the recommendations of ESCOSA at the earliest opportunity starting with inclusion where possible of the recommendations within the current financial documents we are considering?"

Council's emphatic commitment given to all residents and ratepayers was: (emphasis mine)

Council** has carefully considered all of ESCOSA's recommendations and **is committed to

implementing them in a meaningful and transparent way. *While the scheme is advisory and not mandatory, Council has already commenced multiple actions aligned with the advice. These are embedded across the LTFP and ABP, and* ***progress will be reviewed and reported publicly each year.***

Council considers it appropriate that ESCOSA-related actions are reported through the ABP and LTFP in an integrated manner, rather than as a separate standalone update.
As previously stated and reflected in the plans ESCOSA recommendations have been considered and actions are embedded across the ABP and LTFP.
The expectation of a separate ESCOSA update report within the ABP is not considered necessary, as progress is already reported through the existing planning and reporting framework.

Are council's own reports 'phantoms'

Q43 Within the numerous public assurances given to ratepayers since FY 2025) regarding services and expense control improvements, council has frequently restated its priorities are to develop the following…

- a) Service register and benchmarking - "ongoing" means not started?"
- b) Establishment of a service review framework - also "ongoing"
- c) Undertake services reviews and workforce planning - also "ongoing"

But every year the can gets kicked down the road with no results. Supporting this impression we have for the third year now (DABP 2027) these outstanding actions being listed with additional funding being provided to be completed after assurance in last year's DraftABP that they would be completed in the 2026FY.

Can council please clearly state in what it has done and still has to do around these projects?

Projects referenced are clearly outlined in ABP Strategic Work Plan. They are funded and progressing as multi-year initiatives.

Q44 Does council agree that ratepayers are overdue for clearly qualified and quantified objectives and feedback from the promised outcomes in ABP's 24/25, 25/26 and now again 26/27 to the reviews in Q 43 (a, b, c,) and Q 44 (d, e, f)?

It seems whenever council is asked what it is doing about controlling expenses it lists again these " "Unlocking Projects" which are"Critical in driving efficiency, improving service delivery and ensuring sustainable development" stated as

d) Asset Management Plan - still not ready as at June 2026
e) Business Systems - no progress apparent!
f) Workforce Planning - no progress apparent!

No. These are large, multi-year projects, not one-off tasks, and they are progressing as outlined in the ABP and LTFP.

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Q45 **So specifically and stated with particularity, what is the money spent so far on each of Q43 a), b) c) and Q44 d) e) f); and what is budgeted to complete each, what is the percent complete of each?** Please amend the DABP 26/27 to include this previously promised information.
I note with concern that the LTBP allocates $1,697,000 spending on these undefined and unexplained and underachieved "projects"for just these Q43 (a, b, c,) and Q44 (d, e, f) items.

The ABP does not report detailed percentage completions.

Wulanda

Q46 **Does anyone see a problem?**

Wulanda 26/27	Income $3,094,000 +3%	Expenditure $6,764,000 +10%
25/26	Income $2,923,000 +3%	Expenditure $6,188,000
24/25	Income $ * n/avail.	Expenditure $ * n/avail
23/24	Income $2,700,000	Expenditure $ * n/avail

* Information requested from council but not as yet supplied.

Q47 **Is it correct that membership is circa 10% of residents and ratepayers (R&R) and membership plus casual paying entries are <15% of residents.**

Usage data is monitored operationally and not presented in ABP at detailed level

Q48 **At current membership rates for Wulanda**
a) **what percentage increase in membership is needed to break even financially for this discretionary service?and**
b **what increase in membership and casual admission fees is needed to break even financially?**

Detailed scenario modelling is not included in the ABP or LTFP.
Wulanda is a multipurpose community asset; it is not measured purely solely through financial outcomes.

Q49 **To allow staff adequate time to objectively and fully answer the questions submitted this year and to amend the draft plan as appropriate and to still comply with the Local Government Act, what is the latest date that the CoMGC can approve its Business Plan?**

Statutory timelines for adoption are governed by the Local Government Act.
A special Council meeting will be called on either 23 June 2026 or 30 June 2026, this has been identified for the purpose of Council deliberating on the adoption of the draft 2026/2027 ABP and LTFP

Ends
Thank you

Council notes that many questions are already addressed within the ABP and LTFP.

MGDRRA

A voice for our community

TOPICS FOR ORAL SUBMISSION

Below is a list of key topics we wish to address in our oral presentation for the DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET :

1. WULUNDA
- Current and continuous drain on finances
- Lack of forward plan to decrease the burden on ratepayers
- Inappropriate confidentiality application with apparent breach of release conditions
- Electricity costs
- Misleading media releases
- Need for independent review of building costs, maintenance and ongoing upgrades with recommendations for going forward for cost savings and increased revenue generation

2. ESCOSA

Refusal to heed the independent financial recommendations of ESCOSA

3. INAPPROPRIATE AND MISLEADING "BENCHMARKING" TO JUSTIFY RATE RISES AGAINST INDEPENDENT ADVICE
4. FAILURE TO JUSTIFY THE CONTINUAL NEED TO INCREASE STAFF WHEN WE HAVE ONE OF THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF REVENUE SPENT ON STAFF IN THE STATE
5. FAILURE TO JUSTIFY OR SUPPORT THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF COUNCIL ACTIONS/PROJECTS, in particular:
- Hub and spoke model
- Cessation of SEAWL Contract

6. MISLEADING FINANCIAL MEDIA STATEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC such as:
   - Cast In Blue
   - Solar Panels on WULUNDA
7. POOR COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL BUT SPECIFICALLY;

- Information and briefing sessions
- Misleading Councillors
- Failure of Councillors to engage with the public

These are the key topics we will present, but as we are only allowed 5 minutes we will provide a written transcript of our full issues and the associated specific questions for Council consideration at the meeting.

8.

6 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Nil

7 MEETING CLOSE