

2024-25 BUDGET



MAYORAL STATEMENT



2024-2025 – MAYORAL BUDGET STATEMENT

Good morning, Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first budget of the new Council term of 2024-2028. It brings an opportunity to build on the success of the past and leave our own legacy for the benefit of all.

Council remains committed to achieving a surplus budget and proposes a budget with a modest net operating surplus of \$110,000 (excluding capital revenue) and a net result of \$5.13M (including capital revenue). The total revenue is \$60.18M and expenditure of \$55.06M. The capital works program is \$17.5M with \$6.97M of this funded by various grant programs.

Council's financial result for the 2023/2024 is still in the process of being finalised. The result will be impacted by the receipt of the Federal Government's financial assistance grants (FA grant) on 2 July 2024. The timing of FA grants has long been the subject of many debates at our Local Government Association Queensland (LGAQ) annual conference. Council and the LGAQ have lobbied the Federal Government and Queensland Grants Commission for greater certainty in the timing and amount of the FA grant. While Council utilises the FA grant to deliver operations and road works, the timing and unknown value makes it difficult to budget and forecast. The benefit of receiving the FA grant in the year that it is due means we can budget with the knowledge it has been paid. The fact we did not receive it in advance before 30 June means we will end with a deficit result for 2023/2024 despite forecasting a surplus. The importance of receiving the FA grant in the year it is due provides greater certainty and allows Council to recognise the revenue in the year it is expensed.

The key focus for the 2024/2025 budget will be the finalisation of grant funded projects, implementing master plans and planning for future projects to increase our ability to attract State and Federal funding:

Road Network

Our local road network has an allocation of \$7.245M, with \$5.073M dedicated to the re-seal and re-sheet programs. \$16.24M has been estimated for flood recovery works with a high likelihood of additional funds following submissions to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). These are considered operational in nature and not part of the capital works program. The betterment program on the Jakelwar-Goodooga Road will continue with QRA and council funding (total cost \$2.263M).

Works will be completed on the Castlereagh Highway between Hebel and Dirranbandi by the Department of Transport & Main Road's third-party contractor. While this project is not a council contract the works are welcomed to improve the resilience of sections of the Castlereagh Highway that isolate Hebel from our Shire, during flood events.

Council has a number of road performance contracts with Queensland Transport & Main Roads with the Road Performance Maintenance Contract of \$4.98M and Road Performance Contracts to the value of \$2.5M across the State controlled road network.

Other Infrastructure Services

\$705,000 in kerb and channel plus footpath renewals across the Shire and a gravel footpath to the Two Mile at Mungindi (pending Transport & Main Road approval). Drainage plans will be finalised for St George and Mungindi with funding from the State Government's Local Government Grants & Subsidies program.

The Mungindi Water Security project funded by NSW Cross Border Infrastructure fund will continue to connect the bore to reticulation services. (\$880,000) \$630,000 in wastewater relining and upgrades to the holding tanks at our showgrounds will be completed and \$655,000 in water upgrades and renewals are planned across the Shire.

\$590,000 will ensure compliance at the St George Aerodrome which includes \$200,000 in funding from Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Communications and the Arts under the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program Round 10.

Flood Warning Infrastructure Network

Additional flood cameras will be installed as part of a Flood Warning Infrastructure Network fund through QRA. (\$300,000) The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) have sought one additional flood gauge on the Wallam Mungallala catchment that will also be delivered under this program. Tenders will be out soon to start this project and connect with our growing network giving us and the community visibility of road closures and flood ways on both State and local road networks.

Focus on Planning

Master and strategic plans provide significant benefit to Council with ability to attract grant funding and to meet community expectations. Several master plans have already been developed in consultation with our communities - Hebel, St George, Bollon and one nearing completion for Thallon.

Implementation of stage 1 for Hebel will commence with funding through the Bush Tourism Grant (\$245,000). The finishing touches will be applied to the Thallon Campground. (\$32,000) Dirranbandi's master plan for the Rail & River Precinct will see the final components completed. St George river foreshore will see renewal of more shelters as part of stage 2 with finalisation of the CBD furniture in Victoria Street, St George. Beardmore Dam master plan implementation will continue with funding from Sunwater (\$100k). Further planning projects are proposed and are awaiting funding approval – including a Dirranbandi master plan for the township incorporating a sports & recreation precinct.

Detailed design plans for Victoria Street between Henry and Scott Streets, with input from local businesses and community will be developed. A detailed design for Klinge Lane including additional carparking off Grey Street with a view to ease the parking pressures being felt in Victoria Street with increased activity in this area. Council will also continue to seek funding to finalise the northern side of Victoria Street between the Grey and Henry Street intersections.

Rowden Park will see female amenities/change rooms constructed with funding through the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport under the Minor Infrastructure and Inclusive Facilities Grant (\$704,000). This project will provide much needed sport and recreation facilities to support active & healthy women of all ages.

A feasibility study for the Equine & Events centre will be completed in the coming months providing an opportunity for community consultation and giving Council the opportunity to make an informed decision on proceeding with this long-term initiative.

The St George cemetery expansion (\$225,000) consistent with the adopted cemetery master plan.

Implementation of the St George depot master plan will commence to improve traffic flow through council's main depot utilising both Grey Street and Buchan Bypass entry/exits.

A new site plan and design for the Hebel landfill – transfer station will be completed in 2024/2025.

Plans for an industrial development adjacent to the St George aerodrome will be finalised to create an area for commercial and industrial use with the hope of attracting grant funding to complete this project.

Operational Projects

Council's Operational Projects Budget for 2024/2025 (excluding flood recovery works) is \$2.714M including \$1.371M in grant funding.

Council is awaiting funding approval for a range of projects that will provide for community projects and will be announced once the State and Federal Governments provide confirmation.

RATES & CHARGES

The cost of living is ever increasing for households and for Council. We have delivered an overall rate increase equivalent to Council Cost Index (or CPI) of 4% for the general rate and 6% on all utility charges. On average a typical residential property in St George will see an increase of less than \$100 per half year in their rate notice. Council will continue to offer a 30 day discount period of 10% for the August 2024 and February 2025 rate levy. The relief from the accrued interest on outstanding rates for those who enter and honour their payment plans will also apply.

The single rural rate strategy for categories 100,200,300 and 500 will pause in the 2024/2025 financial year with the general rate increasing by 4% across all rating categories. 30% limitations across all rating categories (excluding feedlots) will continue.

Mungindi

Residents in Mungindi will see changes to water and waste utility charges in line with Moree Plains Shire Council plus a 5% administration fee across all categories.

Urban Animal Special Charge

The urban animal special charge will increase from \$23 to \$25 per annum for all residential category 4A and 4B properties across the Shire. This contributes to our compliance services for animal management.

Environmental Special Charge

The environmental special charge applies to all properties outside of the general waste collection area for all townships. The environmental special charge has increased from \$65.50 to \$70 per assessment consistent with the increasing costs of compliance to manage our landfills.

Concessions

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

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

Closing Remarks

With the new term of Council only commencing in early April following the March 16 election our team has worked hard to consider all facets of the budget from the rating model through to the capital and operational projects and operating budget. Council insisted on a surplus budget, and a capital works program that is achievable, as we continue to complete flood recovery works.

Today we set a budget with a modest net operating surplus of \$110,000 (excluding capital revenue) and a net result of \$5.13M (including capital revenue). The total revenue is \$60.18M and expenditure of \$55.06M. Our nine-

year forecast remains promising with net surplus results from recurrent operations as we continue to work towards financial sustainability.

Council looks forward to working with our communities, contractors and suppliers to plan and deliver all projects and continuously improve service delivery. At the same time, we will continue to advocate for our communities through our key stakeholders at a Regional, State and Federal level.

I take this opportunity to thank all our councillors, executive team and staff who have contributed to developing the budget, rating strategies and operational plan.



Councillor Samantha O'Toole

MAYOR

Tabled at the Special Council Meeting to adopt the budget on Thursday 25 July 2024