

### **Draft Transcript**

Surf Coast Shire Ordinary Council Meeting  
Surf Coast Shire Civic Office  
Council Chambers  
1 Merrijig Drive, Torquay, Victoria

Tuesday, 29 April 2025 at 6pm

### **About This Document**

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CR BODSWORTH: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to our April Council meeting. I'm Mayor Mike Bodsworth and it's a pleasure to welcome everybody joining us tonight. This meeting is also being live streamed, so a big welcome to those tuning in online, and of course welcome to my fellow Councillors.

Also next to me tonight is Chris Pike, who is Acting CEO this week, so welcome, Chris. Live captioning will accompany the live stream of this meeting. We hope that this assists those who may have hearing difficulties.

I'd like to acknowledge that we meet on Wadawurrung country tonight and that the Surf Coast municipality also includes the traditional country of the Gadubanud and Gulidjan people of the Eastern Maar Nation. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Surf Coast Shire Council is committed to walking with traditional owners on a reconciliation journey that recognises and celebrates culture and the unique land, sea and waterway country of the Surf Coast. I'd like to also acknowledge any Aboriginal people attending or viewing this meeting tonight.

We commemorated Anzac Day last Friday with services held at RSL subbranches in Torquay, Anglesea, Lorne and Winchelsea. I was grateful for the opportunity to attend the Torquay and Anglesea services to pay respects to those who've served our country and I thank fellow Councillors and Council officers who also attended services across the Surf Coast on Friday. Recognising the service and sacrifices is so important and I thank community for turning out in such strong numbers and thanks to all the volunteers and all of those who participated in those commemorations.

So another big month for events in the Surf Coast Shire with the 62nd Rip Curl Pro happening at Bells Beach, or Djarrak, from 17 April, with competition concluding on Sunday - a fantastic event with pretty good waves and some great crowds.

The welcome was conducted in a new format starting with World Surf League's Community and Partner Breakfast and including presentation of the Surf Coast Shire Rising Stars Surfing Awards to the highest ranking under 18 Surf Coast Shire surfers for the past 12 months. It was a big thrill for the young surfers to be rubbing shoulders with their surfing legends and having their bios read out and receiving medals, event packs, VIP Australian National Surfing Museum passes and a voucher to local cafes and restaurants and there were quite a few chocolate surfing bunnies going around too courtesy of the Great Ocean Road Chocolaterie.

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And finally, I'd like to wish a happy birthday to Surf Coast Shire Council. Amalgamation took place in 1994, but the first Council was elected in late March 1995, so happy 30th birthday to Surf Coast Shire Council.

And now to tonight's agenda. Process - Council meetings operate according to our adopted Governance Rules, which include the following procedures. During the meeting, the mover of a motion or an amendment may speak for a maximum of 5 minutes to open the debate and then a further 2 minutes to make a closing statement. Any other Councillor, including the seconder, may speak to a motion for no more than 3 minutes.

I ask that members of the gallery avoid using mobile phones during the meeting as this can be distracting for Councillors as well as other members of the gallery. I also note that any unauthorised recording of the meeting is prohibited under our Governance Rules. However, you can access a copy of the official recording on our website after the meeting.

I'd now like to recite the Pledge as a sign of Councillors' commitment. As Councillors, we carry out our responsibilities with diligence and integrity and make fair decisions of lasting value for the wellbeing of our community and environment.

Now Apologies. I note that Councillor Phelps is currently away on an approved leave of absence and I will shortly be requesting that a leave of absence be approved on behalf of Councillor Barker, so we will not need to move apologies for either of those Councillors, and I can see that all other Councillors are present, so there are no other apologies for tonight's meeting.

So we turn to Confirmation of Minutes. Can I please have a mover and a seconder to confirm the minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 March 2025 and the Special Council Meeting held on 1 April 2025? Councillor Bourke moved and Councillor Walker seconded. Thank you. Do you wish to speak to those? No, we don't need to do that. I'll put that to the votes. All those in favour. Thanks, Councillors. That's carried unanimously.

I turn to Leave of Absence Requests. Do we have any leave of absence requests? Thank you. So Councillors, at our last Council meeting, in accordance with our 'Councillors as Candidates in State and Federal Elections' policy, Councillor Paul Barker advised that due to his candidature in the upcoming Federal election, he would take leave from Council from the time that the election is called. As the election has since been called, Councillor Barker has requested that a leave of absence be formalised on his behalf at this meeting. The dates of this leave of absence will be from 27 March until 4

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May. Can I please have a mover and a seconder for this leave of absence for Councillor Barker? Moved by Councillor Grist and seconded by Councillor Bourke. Does anybody wish to speak to that? No. Okay, we'll put that to the vote. All in favour? Thanks. That's carried unanimously.

Now Declarations of Conflict of Interest. If a Councillor or an officer has a conflict of interest, they must declare it now and do so again just prior to the item being discussed. The Councillor and/or officer will be requested to leave chambers - or for those online, to be placed by the host in a virtual waiting room - whilst the matter is being considered. Once the matter is resolved, the Councillor and/or officer will be returned to the meeting. Are there any declarations of conflicts of interest for tonight's meeting? No. Thanks. Councillors.

Do we have any presentations from Councillors tonight? Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I'd like to express condolences on behalf of the Surf Coast Shire in relation to the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis and in Latin I'd like to say we send our condolences, which is *consolantibus nostris mittimus*. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. The next agenda item is public question time. Public question time is a time for community members to ask questions or make a submission at a Council meeting. We will always try to provide detailed answers to public questions. However, sometimes this can be difficult when a question relates to an item on the agenda where a decision has not yet been made. In these situations, you'll still be invited to ask your question. However, it may be received by Council as a submission rather than as a question. I can also confirm that Councillors have been provided with copies of all questions and submissions ahead of this meeting.

Also, please be mindful that individual Councillors are not able to answer questions and any question or statement should be directed to Council as a whole. Where your question relates to an item on the agenda, this will be debated shortly, so you will be able to hear more from the Councillors during the debate.

We have four community members who have submitted six questions in total tonight. The first question is from Magdalena Wheatland, from Bellbrae, regarding retirement village land not recognised under differential rating system. Magdalena I believe has joined us tonight. Hi, Magdalena. I'll invite you to come forward and ask your question, please.

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MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: Thank you for the opportunity to allow us to ask questions. Question 1: we have noticed the Shire Draft Budget Report 2025-26 and 2025-29 Draft Revenue and Rating Plan did not take into account Kithbrooke Park retirement village residents' request dated 30 January 2025 to consider and implement a separate category of retirement village land. Can the Council explain the reasons why it continues to bypass the Local Government Guidelines from 2013 to recognise residential properties located within the retirement village as a separate category of properties which are provided with reduced level of service, yet they are charged for services not rendered?

Implementing a differential rate which recognises retirement Village land will help a number of our residents in addressing pressure of cost of living, specifically pertinent to 45% of our residents who after using their savings for the last 10 to 15 years rely on full or part pension. As retirees, we have to learn to live within our means and we feel we are being disadvantaged by the Shire position not to recognise the retirement village land and implement appropriate differential rates based on the land type. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Magdalena. So I'm going to refer your question to the Acting CEO for an answer.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks, Mayor, and thanks, Magdalena, for the question.

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: I'm sorry, I wear hearing aids, so you will need to be louder.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, did you hear what I said, Magdalena?

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: Beg your pardon?

CR BODSWORTH: I said that I'm going to refer your question to the Acting CEO for an answer.

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: Yes, thank you.

MR CHRIS PIKE: And Thanks, Magdalena, and nice to see you. And I think, given Councillors are going to consider the item tonight, as the CEO I'll endeavour to provide some insight into what has arrived in the papers being considered tonight, noting that we've got a few questions about the differential rating system and so we'll cover a bit of ground, I think, across those questions.

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I think the first point I want to acknowledge, and it's where you finished your question, that there are a number of people doing it tough. Cost of living is hitting people across the community and Council does have some measures in place to try to support people experiencing hardship. There's a hardship policy on tonight's agenda, so Council will be debating that particular item too. It's also worth noting that there are concessions on rates for pensioners too.

So it's the Local Government Act that requires Council to consider adopting a Revenue and Rating Plan that has to be done by the end of June and that effectively guides how Council will distribute the rates burden across different categories of ratepayers.

We do reference the ministerial guidelines in preparing differential rating. It's important to nuance that that requires Councils to consider the use of a differential rate. That is that they have to go through the process of considering that. That's something that Councillors have considered in discussions leading to the officer report today. Importantly, it doesn't mandate such a rate. This is the kind of information that Councillors have been considering in the lead-up to tonight's meeting and also in the papers in tonight's meeting. So with full respect, I can assure you that the guidelines haven't been bypassed and Councillors have been considering a range of differential rates in the preparation of the Draft Budget.

One of the challenges - and this will occur across a few of these questions - is that Council has to grapple with the extent to which services in the broader Shire are supported by individual ratepayers, which I think is at the heart of the issue you're talking about, and effectively rates and charges are a tax, so they pay for a broad range of services across a wide area, including infrastructure, and they provide broad community benefit. Some people use some of those services and some won't and that varies across different types of ratepayers in different parts of the Shire.

So really the point I'm seeking to share here is that a common misconception can be that people will judge the value of their rates by what they see in their immediate vicinity and Council's reality is that it has to consider a much broader range of services and infrastructure across a much wider area.

So that's some of the aspects that Council has been considering in developing the Draft Budget, but we'll of course vote on that Draft Budget tonight and that will take it into a consultation process where I'm sure they'd be interested to hear what people have to say.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks for the response, Mr Pike. Magdalena, I'll invite you to ask your second question.

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: My question: can the Council confirm the number of residential dwellings located in the Shire within the Retirement Villages category operating under the Shire Retirement Village Planning Permit and its perceived impact on the budget if Retirement Village Land category was introduced under the differential rating system? In our estimation, the impact on the rate general revenue loss is less than a quarter of a percent to 0.3%, subject to final valuations provided by the Valuer General.

We also would like to put on public record Retirement Village residents are delivering substantial savings on the Council Plan Theme Three - Environmental Leadership, with every retirement village household spending \$900 to \$1,000 a year as a part of the maintenance fee to maintain green spaces to protect significant habitats, landscapes and biodiversity. This delivers over \$300,000 in annual savings to the Shire. We are asking for a Fair Go Rates System compliance and equitable treatment to be extended to retirement villages residents.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Magdalena. I'm also going to request a response from the Acting CEO.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks for your second question, Magdalena. To go to the question itself, because I do note there was some comment for the public record there, so 357, 357 individual properties across the five retirement villages in the Surf Coast Shire.

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: Pardon me?

MR CHRIS PIKE: So 357. So I think a really important point I'd like to emphasise in responding to your question is that the introduction of a lower differential rate for retirement villages wouldn't result in a reduction in Council's overall revenue. So the differential rating system actually is a method of distributing the rates burden across different types of ratepayers. So a reduction in the rates burden for one category of ratepayer results in an increase in the rates burden for another category of ratepayer. So, in effect, a reduction for retirement villages results in an increase for another type of ratepayer.

MAGDALENA WHEATLAND: Excuse me, can I just add something? With due respect, there are over 22,000 properties and if retirement village represents 357, seriously, we're not talking more than \$1.



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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Magdalena. Thanks for your questions tonight and for coming into the meeting. The next question is from Fiona Coyne, who I think is attending tonight. Hi, Fiona.

FIONA COYNE: Hello.

CR BODSWORTH: Would you like to come forward and ask your question?

FIONA COYNE: Yes, thank you. Thank you very much for the opportunity to ask my questions. I have two. The first one relates to the rating plan that's been drafted. I note with disappointment that Council has chosen not to declare a differential rate for retirement villages. Retirement village ratepayers are not treated equitably as they do not receive Council services equal to other ratepayers who receive the full range of services.

The following Council services are not provided to retirement villages: street and path maintenance; green spaces maintenance; street lighting maintenance; and street cleaning. In fact, only the waste collection service is provided to retirement villages.

I refer you to the Local Government Act 2020, section 106, Service Performance Principles. 1. A council must plan and deliver services to the municipal community in accordance with the service performance principles; 2: The following are the service performance principles (a) services should be provided in an equitable manner and be responsive to the diverse needs of the municipal community; (b) services should be accessible to the members of the municipal community for whom the services are intended. There are three more sections which unfortunately the 1,200 character limit didn't allow me to complete, but there are other conditions attached to this particular piece of the Act.

My question is does Council believe that the rating for retirement villages is fair and equitable given the very limited Council services provided to them?

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Fiona. I'm going to refer that question to the Acting CEO for an answer and then I'll invite you to ask your second question.

FIONA COYNE: Sure.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks, Mayor, and thanks, Fiona. It's a tricky question to answer in so much as the purpose of tonight's meeting is for Council to consider endorsing a draft plan that would then be put out. So there's a



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decision for Council to make tonight and then there's consultation period and a decision to be made around final adoption. But I take your point you're referring to what are included in the papers for tonight.

I'll touch on some of my responses to Magdalena's question previously, which is that ongoing challenge that Council has to grapple with the extent to which the services that are provided across the Shire are used by and evident to individual ratepayers in a particular location. So we would recognise that retirement villages are a particular example, but that principle of the link between, the connection between where people live and the services they access and therefore the rates that they should pay is actually a really interesting and challenging topic that Council grapples with in developing its Budget.

FIONA COYNE: We grapple with it too.

MR CHRIS PIKE: I can hear, yes. And in addition, I probably can't touch on the notion of fairness, but Council does consider the concept of equity when it's developing its Draft Budget and a Draft Revenue and Rating Plan and again, slight level of repetition here, but every time Council produces one of these plans, it's weighing up different categories of ratepayers and what might be considered fair and equitable for those different ratepayers, whilst appreciating your position.

So as I mentioned, really the decision for Council tonight is whether to endorse the plan as it's presented tonight and then to engage in a consultation period and to ultimately make a decision in June to consider the adoption of a final version.

FIONA COYNE: I understand the process and we at Kithbrooke Park and the other main retirement village in Torquay, the Star of the Sea, are very open to further consultation and any assistance that we can provide in providing an understanding and perhaps an education for how we perceive the inequality and unfairness.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Fiona. So I'll invite you to ask your second question now.

FIONA COYNE: My second question is in addition to retirement village residents being compelled to pay full rates for very limited Council services, they must pay village service fees for the maintenance not provided by Council. In a retirement village, infrastructure such as roads, footpaths, kerbs and street lighting are maintained by long-term maintenance funds and

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operating funds generated by monthly fees paid by the residents. Village facilities such as gyms, libraries, bowling greens, open spaces, pools and village clubhouses mean there is a reduced load on Council-funded public facilities. Without the use of a differential rating system, Council is collecting additional payment for services that have not been delivered. I note that several other Councils in Victoria have declared a differential rate for retirement villages. Assuming that the answer to my first question is in the affirmative, will Council reconsider the request to declare a differential rate for retirement villages in the Rating Plan 2025-2029?

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Fiona. I'm going to refer that as well to the Acting CEO for an answer.

MR CHRIS PIKE: And thanks again, Fiona. I think - I hope the answer makes sense in that really the answer to your question is going to be established both through the vote on tonight's paper and then that intervening period where it's listening, should that be the resolution tonight and then our final decision in June. So ultimately I guess your point has been made clearly in front of the Councillors and ultimately the answer to that question will be borne out from those decisions made by Council.

FIONA COYNE: Yes, thank you. I suppose when you boil it down to do you support the concept of paying for no service, that's our perspective. Some banks did try that. They got into trouble.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Fiona. Thanks for attending tonight and asking your questions.

FIONA COYNE: Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Our next question is from Robyn Amenta and Robyn I believe is also here. Hi, Robyn.

ROBYN AMENTA: How are you going?

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks.

ROBYN AMENTA: And thank you. So my question really follows on from the other two, but perhaps just drills down a little bit more on the monetary basis.

So residents of Kithbrooke Country Club Retirement Village have requested Council to apply a differential rates system as we pay levies that include services that are normally provided by Council. These include, although are

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not exclusively limited to these, road maintenance and long-term replacement of roads, lighting operations and maintenance and green open space.

The cost of lighting, road maintenance and the capital cost to resurface such roads in, say, 40 years averages an annual cost to each villa of \$224.74 per annum, excluding inflationary increases. This equates to 10.6% of the rates we paid in 24-25. Retirement village ratepayers are not treated equal to other ratepayers who receive the full range of services.

Council received additional revenue of approximately \$45,000 in 24-25 financial year from Kithbrooke residents for services not provided. Kithbrooke provides green spaces, pools and club facilities, which reduces the demand on public facilities. Also, Kithbrooke has provided our club rooms for Council events and provides regular access to community groups, including Rotary and multiple Probus clubs.

If Council is not prepared to apply a differential rates system, will Council fulfil its obligations to provide a fair treatment to all ratepayers by supplying all services, including the cost of repairs and replacement of roads and lighting at Kithbrooke Park Country Club? Otherwise we see the current treatment as both unfair and unethical.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Robyn. I'm going to refer your question to the Acting CEO.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thank you, Robyn, and I'm going to try to build on some of the previous responses, forgive me if I'm a little bit repetitive, and some information I haven't touched on so far.

So the ministerial guidelines that allow for Council to apply differential rate apply to retirement village land, and I'll emphasise the land. They don't allow for a differential rate to be applied to one particular retirement village. So if Council were to consider this, it's across all of those villages, the five within the Shire, and I would imagine that those different villages have different levels of amenities within them.

I do think Councillors would understand the point that you're making. I understand the point that you're making in posing that question. I think I would advise that officers don't believe that Council has an obligation to fund services within Kithbrooke in lieu of a differential rate, but I do understand the point that's being made in posing the question.

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And I would reiterate in developing a Revenue and Rating Plan, in developing a budget, it's quite a balancing act for Council and your point has been made clearly and I imagine it's something that council will be considering, as I mentioned earlier, both in the consideration of the item tonight and then prior to the adoption of the final report in June.

ROBYN AMENTA: Okay, thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Robyn, for the question. The next question is from Naomi Stewart from Torquay, who I don't believe is joining us tonight so I'm going to read out Naomi's question on her behalf: "At last month's Council meeting I inquired whether there are still three onsite car parks at the development 26 Silvereye Street, to be known as 2 Rosella Road Torquay, and whether these vehicles can exit the site in a forward motion as per the Planning Scheme. The answer provided by General Manager, Placemaking and Environment, Chris Pike, 'We have looked at the most recent plans we have on file which formed part of the Certificate of Compliance and can confirm that the plans still show three car parking spaces with dimensions compliant with Australian standards and allow vehicles to exit in a forward manner. Given you believe that construction may not be consistent with those plans, I'll ask our team to check this.' I feel this response is ambiguous. Has this review taken place and can you please advise what the outcome of the review was? Please note that we have a current Freedom of Information request and would appreciate receiving as a matter of haste, please. So I'll refer Naomi's question to Mr Pike.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks, Mayor, and hi, Naomi. Perhaps you're watching, live or on delay.

I did follow up after my response last time. I do understand the Council's Manager of Planning and Compliance has been in touch with you and posed some questions about the details, the specifics of where you feel there are differences from those plans. Those questions have been put to you and we are waiting for a response.

In receiving that response, Council has got quite a limited role in the process, but we are prepared and do have capacity to make inquiries on your behalf and that would be either to the builder or to the building surveyor. So really my advice to you would be to respond to those requests for information and the sooner we have that information, we can follow that up on your behalf.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Mr Pike, and thanks, Naomi, for the question.

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We have a question without notice which I'm going to admit from Graham Stockton of Nortons Road, Bellbrae. Graham, I can see you're in the room tonight. Do you have a copy of the question that I have or is this the only copy in existence?

GRAHAM STOCKTON: (Inaudible).

CR BODSWORTH: So I'll invite you to come and ask your question. If you'd like to take this back to jog your memory, you can grab it.

GRAHAM STOCKTON: Good evening, Councillors and officers. Thanks for the opportunity to ask a question.

In the Budget allocation for next financial year in section 2.3, which is page 53 of the entire document, under Environmental Leadership, I note a decrease of 42,000 for the budget on climate change. My question is are Councillors aware of this and as the Chairperson for Surf Coast Environment Group, which tackles sustainability issues, especially climate, we would urge that there needs to be an increase, not a decrease.

And in relation to the carbon neutral plan that I see in the document also, I can imagine that that money could work really well with the option that's been chosen, which is option 2, about allocating funds not to overseas programs or outside or external to the shire, but actually offsetting our carbon emissions within the shire and how that money might be spent very usefully on a climate emergency officer to have a conversation with the community about how we could best utilise that process.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Graham. So I'll take that as a half question and half submission and I know that Mr Pike is able to address some of what you've posed tonight, so I'm going to ask him to respond, if that's okay.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Yes. Through the Mayor, and thanks, Graham, I'll provide some - I can't answer on behalf of Councillors, but what I can shine some light on is that reduction that you talked about. So through the development - the budget process, that reflects a reduction in full-time equivalent staffing levels in the climate action team as discussed through the budget process with Councillors, reflecting the not filling a vacant role within that team and that equates to that value that you included in your question.

GRAHAM STOCKTON: Will that be reviewed?

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CR BODSWORTH: Well, it's a Draft Budget for public exhibition, so there's a review potential in that. Thanks, Graham.

So that brings us to the end of public question time. There are no petitions for tonight's meeting. The next item on the agenda is Notices of Motion and we have one Notice of Motion for tonight's meeting which relates to the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund. Councillor Grist, you submitted this Notice of Motion. Would you like to move the motion?

CR GRIST: Thank you, Mayor, yes.

CR BODSWORTH: And do I have a seconder for the motion? Councillor Bourke, thank you. So now, Councillor Grist, I'll invite you to speak to your motion.

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I'll just run through what the motion is. The motion is that the Council writes to the Premier of Victoria, the Treasurer of Victoria, the Victorian Minister of Local Government, the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery to advocate for the following outcomes: 1.1, that the Victorian Government abandon the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund, the Bill, and it's associated levy; and 1.2, should the Government not abandon the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Bill that the Victorian Government remove the requirement for Victorian Councils to collect the SVF on behalf of the Victorian Government. Point 2, requires the correspondence identified in point 1 to request the following actions from the Victorian Government and the relevant ministers regarding the alternative outcome identified in point 1.2: that the Victorian Government utilises State Revenue Office to directly manage the collection of the ESVF, the levy formula be recalculated to ensure that rural and regional communities do not disproportionately bear the financial burden for emergency services across the state and that the Victorian Government guarantees that funds collected from rural communities be reinvested into those same communities through direct emergency services funding. Point 3, the Council authorises the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate to pursue other additional avenues of advocacy if considered appropriate for the purposes of achieving objectives identified in point 1. And finally, point 4, requires the advocacy identified in this resolution to take place prior to 12 May 2025.

The rationale behind this motion is that the implementation of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund represents a significant state tax reform that effectively doubles the levy which will unduly impact regional ratepayers, particularly farmers, within our municipality. These ratepayers will bear a disproportionate share of the cost of emergency services across both the Shire

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and the state. Furthermore, the administrative burdens and complexities introduced by the Bill will place an excessive strain on Council staff, requiring substantial reconfiguration of Council systems to accommodate the collection of this new State Government tax.

By way of background, on 13 December 2024, the Victorian Government announced changes to the Fire Services Property Levy, renaming it to the ESVF. The ESVF will be calculated based on two components, a fixed amount and a variable rate. The prescribed variable rate component will significantly increase starting on 1 July 2025 as follows: the residential rate will increase from 8.7 to 17.3 cents, which is approximately a 99% increase; commercial land will increase from 66.4 to 133 cents, which is approximately a 100% increase, industrial land from 81.1 to 133 cents, which is approximately a 64% increase; and primary production land, farming land from 28.7 to 83 cents, which is approximately a 189% increase.

From 1 July 2026, Councillors will be required to administer and collect varying levies depending on whether a residence is a principal place of residence. This change will disproportionately affect primary producers within the Shire, a sector that constitutes one of the top five industries in our area. The increase in the levy will impose a substantial and unbudgeted financial burden on the agricultural community, which could have adverse economic consequences.

As a regional Council, this new obligation introduces significant administrative complexity, diverting valuable resources away from essential local government functions. The responsibility for collecting a statewide tax such as the ESVF should not fall on local Councils as it creates inefficiencies and places unnecessary burdens on staff and resources.

Additionally, the process of administering and collecting the levy, including complicated reporting and the handling of refunds for eligible volunteers, requires a considerable amount of time and resources. Moreover, the State Government already possesses the data related to the principal place of residence which is used for land tax services. Given this, the proposed motion seeks to call upon the State Government to either abolish the ESVF or assume full responsibility for its administration and collection.

In conclusion, in light of the significant impacts on regional ratepayers, the administrative burden on Council staff and the inefficiencies in the proposed collection process, it is imperative that the Council advocate for the withdrawal of this increased tax and/or the removal of this responsibility from local



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government and call on the State Government to take full responsibility for managing the ESVF.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. Councillor Bourke?

CR BOURKE: Thank you, Mayor. I second Joel's motion. Council should push back the Victorian Government should abandon the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Bill and its associated levy or, at the very least, should remove the requirement for the Victorian Councils to collect the ESVF on behalf of the Victorian Government.

It's important to note that this NOM would not remove any existing levy or benefits to our community. To my mind, this Bill is a scramble at tax gouging already overburdened taxpayers, ratepayers, leaving the brunt of community pushback, confusion and administrative nightmare with our Council staff. I wholeheartedly support this NOM and encourage my fellow Councillors to do the same.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Bourke. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I thank Councillor Grist for this motion and I also thank Councillor Bourke for seconding it.

I support this nomination or this motion for a few reasons. One reason is that now Victoria is receiving more money from the Federal Government and for a long time Victoria and New South Wales has subsidised other states and as a Victorian, I don't mind Tasmania and other states being subsidised, but the population has increased substantially in Victoria and as a percentage more so than other jurisdictions. So given the Federal Government has now allocated billions of dollars more, that's one reason.

I also agree with the administration of the tax on behalf of local governments which seems to be unfair and I concur about those points raised by Councillors Grist and Bourke. The fact that there's also a very bad drought happening at the moment too, I feel that primary producers - many of them for a number of years have no income and have sold stock either last year or the year before. I actually own stock myself and I've purchased hay and feed at a considerable cost and I don't envisage making money myself either and the prospect of earning income won't eventuate until one or two or three years' time because you have to rebuy stock or replant crops and then the rains have to come, and hopefully they will. So that is another reason why I support this motion.

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As we know too and tonight the Mayor and CEO have also spoken about the cost of living pressures and the fact that we've had inflation and inflation has decreased, fortunately, but cost of living as well is affecting all people. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? No? Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. I would just like to add I do think we need to be careful about seeking to abandon the emergency services levy. Being in the Surf Coast Shire, we're one of the most bushfire-prone regions in the state and I think it's prudent that our region may well be the beneficiaries of some of what's generated through this emergency services levy.

So I understand there's concern around the increased burden to ratepayers and the way that it's administered through Council and through our rates notices and then passed directly on to the State Government, but I can't support abolishing the emergency services levy because in the face of climate change and those sorts of things, I think a fund to respond, you know, to emergency situations is very important for our region in particular. So I won't be supporting the NOM.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Any other Councillors? Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Emergency services need funds to do what they need to do, but with these proposed funds coming out of the Emergency Services Fund, there's no transparency in how the funds will be allocated across the emergency services and that's been told from our local operators and emergency services around that too. They're not sure how it will be distributed across the different emergency services, but also if it even comes back to the volunteers, which it should be.

It's an unfair financial burden on our ratepayers, particularly as you get further inland it increases more and more on the farmers and that sort of thing, which most of them have volunteered in the past or continue to. So it's a burden that's going to come back on the land when they're going to have to keep fundraising individually.

If it is tacked on to the back of rates or anything else, there's going to be a high likelihood that it's going to be a higher debt recovery with that too.

So I support this motion. I support that there does need to be funds allocated to emergency services, but I don't think this is the way it is with the lack of

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transparency and clarity coming forward in this type of fund. So I support this motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Walker. Councillor Stapleton?

CR STAPLETON: One more. Thank you. Look, I'm happy to support this motion. I agree with Councillor Pattison that it's really important to have the funds in place to support our fire emergency services. My understanding is that by advocating for the abolition of this bill, it wouldn't mean that the money that is currently raised for the fire services levy would necessarily be abolished, but I don't think it's suitable for Councils to be the collection agency for a new State Government tax. It's a significant increase to what's already in place.

I know through the Municipal Association of Victoria, which has an upcoming State Council meeting, that they're doing a lot of advocacy on behalf of local councils on this issue and to date the MAV board has received and endorsed 18 Council motions from across Victoria relating to concerns about the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund, which is the levy we're talking about, and that that advocacy will be considered at the next MAV State Council meeting on 16 May. So watch this space.

Look, I do think it's important that we work constructively with the State Government to come to an appropriate solution. I don't think the one that's currently on the table is appropriate and hopefully we can find a better outcome. But I'm happy to support this advocacy around it. Thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Councillor Grist, do you have any closing comments?

CR GRIST: No, I think it's been covered pretty well. I do agree with what Councillor Stapleton has just said. I don't think it's going to detract from having a fire levy going forward and I think the impact on the primary producers is the thing that needs to be really addressed because, as was stated, they're often the volunteers in the services, in the rural communities.

I'll just check my notes here, sorry. The suggestion that the rural communities - well, the Victorian Government guarantees that the funds collected from rural communities be reinvested in those same communities, that hasn't been decided yet, so that's the concern we have for our regional area. So hopefully we can address those issues and get something better than what's being proposed.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. We'll now put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And against? Thank you. The motion is carried 6-1.

We now turn to the Report section of our agenda and item 4.1 is the Victorian Government Minister's Good Practice for Service Rates and Charges. The purpose of this report is to provide an update following the April 2024 Council Meeting report on the Victorian Government Minister's Good Practice Guidelines for Service Rates and Charges and implications for Council. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Pattison - is that as per the recommendation?

CR PATTISON: Yes, as per the recommendation.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Do we have a seconder for that?

CR BOURKE: Sorry, I was waving, not seconding.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Walker. Councillor Pattison, I'll invite you to speak to the motion.

CR PATTISON: Thank you. So Surf Coast Shire is a leader in the waste management sector both in coastal townships as well as generally local government areas in the state. The Surf Coast has a 74% recovery rate from landfill based on data from our Circular Economy Action Plan and this is well ahead of other, as I said, coastal towns and the state in general.

Work is progressing on the regional organics network in collaboration with Barwon Water and our surrounding other regional local government areas to have a local FOGO, or food and organics recycling, as well as the development and support for the SCRRApp - I'm sure many people use and love the SCRRApp, I know I love the reminders - which helps residents to know which bin to put out each week. And there's very strong support for the soft plastics trial that we had in 2024 and the Council is looking into the future at some point to put forward further soft plastic recycling options for our community. Being responsible with reducing recycling and efficiently managing our waste is a priority for many in our community.

The Good Practice Guidelines have created confusion and inconsistency in how this important work is funded. The waste guidelines, if applied, would impact - or the best practice guidelines in the context of waste, if applied, would impact all of these outcomes and future planned initiatives. This is inconsistent with the Local Government Act and also the Circular Economy Act

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2021, which enables the use of waste charges to cover the cost of residential and municipal waste services.

The cost to Council of following the guidelines, the Best Practice Guidelines, is estimated at \$3 million of annual operating expenditure and \$16 million in future waste capital project expenditure. So to continue the good work we are doing in the waste space would require other activities to stop or be reduced to accommodate this cost.

We have a strong tourist economy, which is wonderful. However, with that comes an increased burden on our waste services. Nobody wants overflowing bins in the town centre, especially not during our peak tourist times. No one wants litter, building waste, sediment entering our stormwater drains and ultimately ending up in our oceans. These Good Practice Guidelines make the funding of these outcomes difficult and exempt from the waste charges.

It's for these reasons that the motion before us sets out to clarify that the Draft 25-26 Budget has been prepared to align with the existing legislation and not the Good Practice Guidelines. So thank you very much.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Reiterating what Councillor Pattison has just already spoken of around the additional services that we do offer around not just the provision of waste services for the community, but the kerbside collections, the waste disposal and recycling material, the public litter management and the operation of Council's recovery centres and the landfill. In particular, we've just come out of a really big peak season and we've been kept on top of that down the coast with our tourists down there and without that extra services that we do have, it wouldn't be a very nice place to be with the amount of rubbish around and things. So we need to keep that going and support this motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Walker. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? No? Thank you. Are there any closing comments, Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: No closing comments.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, we'll put that to a vote. All in favour? Thanks, it's carried unanimously.

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The next item, 4.2, is the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report for Public Exhibition. The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement to place the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report on public exhibition. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion?

CR STAPLETON: Yes.

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Stapleton?

CR STAPLETON: As per the recommendation.

CR BODSWORTH: And seconded by Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: I also have amendments as well, so I'm not sure when you'd like me to read those.

CR BODSWORTH: Can you please outline your amendment, Councillor Schonfelder?

CR STAPLETON: I think that's meant to happen after it's seconded.

CR BODSWORTH: Sorry, Councillor Schonfelder, were you seconding the motion as well and then --

CR SCHONFELDER: Yes.

CR BODSWORTH: -- preparing to read your amendment?

CR SCHONFELDER: Yes.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thank you.

CR SCHONFELDER: Would you like to hear it now?

CR BODSWORTH: Sorry, I'm just going to check in with the Governance team whether it's okay in the procedure.

OFFICER: I just want it to be clear that the mover and the seconder of a motion can't move an amendment. So if Councillor Schonfelder was intending to move an amendment, it might be better that someone else seconds that motion.

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CR BODSWORTH: Okay, so taking that advice, I'm looking for a seconder for the motion that Councillor Stapleton has put as per the recommendation on the Budget, which would enable Councillor Schonfelder to then propose an amendment. So do I have a seconder for that motion? Councillor Walker, thank you. So I note that that's been moved by Councillor Stapleton, seconded by Councillor Walker, and that Councillor Schonfelder is now able to outline his proposed amendment.

CR SCHONFELDER: The officer recommendation, except that the Draft Budget report be amended prior to being placed on public exhibition to change the farm rate land from 75% of the general rate land to be 50% of the general rate land.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Does the Governance team have that proposed amendment in writing so that we can display it for Councillors? And while we're doing that, I'd like to understand what the impact of that proposed amendment could be before I accept it as an amendment. An amendment under our Governance Rules has to propose a substantially similar outcome to the motion that it's proposing to amend, so I want to understand how similar the outcome might be if that amendment was accepted. So I'll put that.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Very happy to help you with that one. So that proposition to reduce the differential rate for farming land, farming property, so there are 941 farming properties. So in this instance you'd see a reduction in the rates, the average - an average reduction, I should say, sorry, of \$944, so an average of \$944 reduction across 941 properties, and then the corresponding sort of balancing increase is across the general rate and commercial industrial rate land and that would have an average increase of \$39, impacting 23,304 properties.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Mr Pike. So that's good information on the impact of the proposed amendment. So, in my view, considering that the Governance Rules require that an amendment proposes a substantially similar outcome and when I look at the quantum spread over 20,000 ratepayers, I can't see that as a substantially similar outcome. So to me I would not accept that as an amendment and I would propose that that be - if you'd like, Councillor Schonfelder, to foreshadow that as an alternate motion.

CR SCHONFELDER: I did have a much longer foreshadowed motion which Governance does have, so I imagine - I don't know if they display that now or they display that if this motion is not supported, the current motion.



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CR BODSWORTH: So you're able to foreshadow an alternate motion should the substantive motion not be voted in. So that alternate motion can be - subject to our governance rules, it can be whatever you want it to be, whatever you propose.

CR SCHONFELDER: Would you like me to read it out, Mayor, or would you like the Governance team --

CR BODSWORTH: Yes, we do need to understand what your foreshadowed motion would be.

MR CHRIS PIKE: If I could, Mayor, if I can just check with the Governance team that that would be during debate.

OFFICER: Through you, Chair, correct. During the debate Councillor Schonfelder has the right to foreshadow a motion and then we'll place that up on the screen.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thanks, CEO and Governance team. So we will now commence the debate on the motion. So Councillor Stapleton as the mover, take it away.

CR STAPLETON: Thank you, Mayor. I'm happy to endorse this Draft Budget Report to go out to our community for consideration and for feedback. It is a responsible Budget document that's been carefully crafted to balance the financial challenges of our time, whilst still delivering the important services, programs and facilities our community requires and it is aligned with delivering outcomes of the existing Council plan, acknowledging that Council is currently working on a new Council plan for the next four-year term.

The Budget ensures Council retains a sustainable long-term financial outlook, despite our challenging economic environment, with ongoing inflation, increasing costs for Council and for our community. It is becoming more and more difficult to absorb the impact of costs that are increasing by more than the revenue we are able to raise through rates.

While the forecast result shows an unallocated cash surplus of \$2.2 million, this is not something to get excited about or to think can be spent on new projects or other items. This surplus is critical in setting us up for a sustainable future and being able to fund Council projects over the life of the long-term financial plan due to forecast deficits in coming years.

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One of the important principles of Council's strategic financial management planning is that accumulated unallocated cash should not fall below \$250,000 in any one year. If you look at the long-term financial plan, you will see that this is achieved through to 2035.

Council has been working hard over multiple years to identify savings through its business reform program and I'm pleased to see an allocation of \$100,000 to support service reviews in the coming year to help ensure services continue to provide value for money and are delivered in the most efficient and effective way possible to meet the needs of our community.

A critical part of Council's financial strategy is to allocate and increase its investment in asset renewal over the 10 years of the long-term financial plan to not only ensure Council's sustainability into the future, but also effectively manage the longevity and efficiency of assets for our community. This sees an incremental increase in asset renewal allocations every year to effectively double over the next 10 years from just over \$10 million now to \$21 million by 2035. This is a significant commitment and forms a significant part of Council's Budget.

With all this in the backdrop, we've still been able to deliver a Draft Budget that features something for everyone in our community. Some highlights include \$64.25 million in proposed capital works, including multi-year projects such as the Wurdi Baierr Aquatic and Recreation Centre, which is the pool, the Torquay hockey pitch and the Karaaf diversion project to help manage stormwater impacts. There's also more than \$15 million allocated to new projects with a strong focus on roads and pathways and an ongoing commitment to core services, such as open space, civil and road maintenance and community facilities.

Our commitment to protect and enhance the natural environment continues, including the ongoing Branching Out program partnering with community to plant trees across urban areas over a six-year period.

Rates are Council's largest revenue source and lay the foundation for delivery of services and infrastructure for the community. The proposed rate rise of 3% is in line with the State Government's Fair Go Rates System, otherwise known as the Rate Cap, and is consistent with the requirement for us as the governing body to protect the long-term financial sustainability of Council, which is a critical function of our role as Councillors.

I encourage everyone to have a read of the Draft Budget. It's very accessible and provides a great insight into the range of services and programs that

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Council delivers for our community. Along with the required financial statements, there are appendices that community should take note of. You'll find the fees and charges schedule as well as budget highlights for each ward.

I especially encourage you to read the appendix document Our Financial Story, which provides a very meaningful insight into the challenge that Council faces trying to meet demands in the context of a rate capped environment. As well as facing a general increase in operating costs, there are additional costs associated with the impacts of climate change, maintaining our assets to a high standard, and managing the growing complexities of the Shire's waste and recycling program, which you've just heard about in the previous item - all of this while also planning for the closure and rehabilitation of Anglesea landfill.

It can be done, but it needs to be managed carefully and strategically. What you see here is a responsible budget that recognises these financial constraints, provides a financially viable long-term operation and prioritises services and works in a manner that best addresses the needs of our growing community.

Please read it and provide feedback through the formal process which Council will consider in coming months before the final Budget is developed and considered in June. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton. Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor, and thank you, Councillor Stapleton, for highlighting a lot of things that I was going to anyway, so that's good.

The 25-26 Draft Budget is exactly that, it's a Draft Budget. It's aligned and focused on the delivery of outcomes identified in the Council plan of the 21-25 term, which is coming to an end, where the following 26-27 Budget will be more reflective of the new upcoming Council plan coming out later on in the year.

There's been a lot of work done on preparing this Budget and as a new Council trying to pull in the bottom line and considering the cost of living while being a sustainable and viable Council. I encourage all ratepayers to read the Draft Budget and provide feedback so we can move on to the final Budget, but yes, take your time to read through everything and provide that valuable feedback which we'll need.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Walker. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the item?

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CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I was going to ask about the foreshadowed alternative motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Sure, so you can outline that foreshadowed motion now.

CR SCHONFELDER: And governance will put it on the large screen. I can read it out, but the alternative motion is, "That Council requires the CEO to amend the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report (Attachment 1) to include a rate increase of 0% and a farm rate of 50% of the residential rate", which I might add City of Greater Geelong has that, they have 50% for their farming community, and the value of properties on average in the Surf Coast is actually higher --

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Schonfelder, I'm just reminding you you're not speaking to the motion now, you're just defining it.

CR SCHONFELDER: Oh, okay, yes - "with the reduction in revenue to Council being funded through a reduction in the accumulated unallocated cash reserve of \$1.7m in 2025-26, and reduced service delivery and projects in subsequent years. 2. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to give public notice of the preparation of the proposed budget and invite submissions on the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report for the exhibition period from 7 May to 2 June 2025. 3. Provides access to the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report on Council's website and in hard copy at the Council Office, the Lorne Visitor Information Centre, the Anglesea Community House and the Winchelsea Community house. 4. Notes that a Special Council Meeting for Hearing Submissions on the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report will be held on Tuesday 10 June 2025 at 6pm if required. 5. Commits to consider all submissions on the 2025-26 Draft Budget Report. 6. Considers the adoption of the final 2025-26 Budget Report and the declaration and levy of rates and charges at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 24 June 2025. 7. Requires the Chief Executive Officer to reflect the changes identified in this resolution into the Draft Revenue and Rating Plan (Agenda item 4.3) where applicable."

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder, and thanks to the Governance team for displaying that. So procedurally, if the substantive motion that we've begun debating is lost, then Councillor Schonfelder, you have the opportunity to put your foreshadowed motion.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I wish to speak against the current motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Oh, okay. Go ahead, Councillor Schonfelder.

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CR SCHONFELDER: I said earlier about the City of Greater Geelong and the relationship we have with them. I was asked what I thought of the Council and I have said I think of them like a bigger sister and brother and I'm not necessarily saying we should do everything that City of Greater Geelong do, but I think it is worth noting that they charge their farming community 50% compared to the residential rating system. And once again, given that the property values in the Surf Coast are higher than City of Greater Geelong, I think that's something worth considering.

I've lived in the local area my whole life and I love the fact that we have a farming community and the fact that we have a hinterland that is such a beautiful area and people who contribute enormously to economic activity in the region and I know that G21 backed that up. It's actually billions of dollars.

Also, I have mentioned about the drought and the drought hasn't ended yet and the drought has been declared in the Surf Coast. I believe it's been declared in Colac Otway Shire, Corangamite and other shires.

We've spoken about levies tonight and we've mentioned the State Government. I do feel that - the rate cap is 3%, but I do feel very uncomfortable. I feel it's highly unethical to have rate increases during a declared drought. That's that point.

Another point is cost of living, the fact that I recently met someone in Winchelsea on the weekend who has bought a block and he told me he probably is going to sell the block. He can't afford to build the house. And I know during budget briefings we've talked about how much rates might go up per week or go up and it's a cup of coffee or it's not a hell of a lot of money, but it all adds up. It's all aggregate and the cost of living with inflation that was quite high and it has reduced, all levels of government need to help particularly young families and young people who want to buy houses. I think a lot of people will never be able to buy a property, unfortunately, and I think all governments need to rein in spending and cut back taxes and costs for people.

I've been a member of this Council for five years. I've always supported the Draft Budget and I've always supported the Budget, but this year I won't be supporting the Draft Budget and I really would implore my colleagues to really think twice about this, please, because I think it is extremely serious and in the 30 years of the Surf Coast Shire, the most serious matter that we've dealt with. Thank you, Mayor.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Councillor Bourke, you were next, I think - did you have your hand up?

CR BOURKE: Oh, that was before.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, so I invite other Councillors to speak. Councillor Pattison.

CR PATTISON: Thank you. The Draft Budget being put forward tonight proposes to implement a rate increase of 3% for the 25-26 Budget. This Budget will see Council to continue to deliver services for our community, meeting our asset renewal and development commitments whilst planning ahead in the longer term for key challenges in the form of future community growth, increasing asset renewal and impending landfill rehabilitation obligations as well as, importantly, responding to and adapting to climate change.

Council plans to spend a record \$64.25 million on capital works in this budget, including some very significant projects, such as the aquatic and health centre pool and the hockey pitch and a number of others which have already been raised tonight. So this reflects new capital works spending of around \$15.1 million and ongoing capital works that have been carried over of around \$49.1 million.

Later in the context of tonight's meeting we will be voting on the revised hardship policy. This defines the support mechanisms for those who are struggling with the cost of living pressures. So I think it's really important when we talk about that we don't want a rate increase because people are struggling, for those that are struggling, there is a hardship policy and officers will work directly with affected residents, ratepayers to ensure - nobody wants people to choose between food and their rates, that's just not acceptable, and those people will work with officers.

For those that can afford to pay their rates, we need to be paying those rates so that we have a financially viable Council and Council continues - can continue to deliver maintenance of our roads and drainage, maintaining our open space, our sports fields, our club rooms, Positive Ageing Month activities, libraries, kindergartens, maternal health. There are so many amazing services that Council delivers and we need to be financially viable and therefore it is sensible and prudent to put forward a Draft Budget with a 3% - applying the full 3% rate increase. I really look forward to hearing feedback from our community through the consultation when the Budget goes out for consultation. So thank you very much.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Councillor Grist.

CR GRIST: Thank you, Mayor. I do not support this Draft Budget. I do not endorse passing on the full 3% rate cap. I want the community to know that implementing the full 3% rate cap increase was not part of an original Draft Budget supported by a slim majority of Councillors. Some Councillors may dismiss a 0.25% incremental decrease as an insignificant benefit to the ratepayer, suggesting the difference to the ratepayer is just the price of a coffee, implying that you would waste it anyway and they know how to spend your money better than you. I find that attitude quite elitist.

Your hard-earned money belongs to you. You should always have a choice how to spend it, but rates and taxes are forced on you and remove that choice. If we left you alone with more money in your pocket, you could voluntarily support your local clubs and businesses, voluntarily pay for services you need now or save it to pay for those you'll need in the future, or even pool funds with your neighbours to kick off a local project. That way you voluntarily contribute to the services and infrastructure you want and need and the full value stays in your community, rather than being forced from you and filtered through the Council bureaucracy where a significant portion often disappears into administration before anything reaches your township.

I do not endorse a budget that does not provide a differential rate for retirement villages and forces those residents to pay rates for services and infrastructure they already pay for in their body corporate and service fees. I do not endorse a budget that allows the bureaucracy to take your money and give \$5,000 grants to a political activist group without Council oversight. I do not endorse a budget that allows the bureaucracy to take your money and give it to an artist to fly interstate to promote themselves or buy equipment for their own personal use to further their own career, again with no Council oversight.

CR PATTISON: Point of order.

CR BODSWORTH: What's your point of order, Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: I think that I'd like clarification around some of the aspersions that are being raised around our grants program.

CR BODSWORTH: So I'm going to allow your point of order. Councillor Grist, the general tone of some of your comments I find is undermining, or would



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tend to undermine, public confidence in the integrity of Council and organisation, which comes under the Councillor Model Code of Conduct, the question of integrity, and so I ask you to refrain from making that kind of comment that could undermine public confidence in the integrity of the organisation and Council. I'm not going to ask you to withdraw anything. I just ask you to be mindful of that aspect of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct when you're speaking.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I just would like to seek clarification, please. I believe in point of orders it has to be relevance, it has to be a specific point of order. I don't think we're entitled to ask for further information from a colleague. I'm aware of that.

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Schonfelder, I've made my ruling on Councillor Pattison's point of order. I included quite a lot of information in that. So I stand by that point of order and request that Councillor Grist continue to speak, but bear in mind what I've said in relation to the Code of Conduct.

CR GRIST: Well, there's many more examples, but I'll go to my conclusion. The only reason to support this Budget is that despite all these excesses and indiscretions, our skilled finance department has managed to still provide a cash surplus. However, I believe there is still a lot of fat to trim from this organisation to enable rate relief to our community and to provide the infrastructure and services we need and the surplus. Should this Draft Budget pass Council tonight, I hope the community will respond with strong objection to a Budget that supports this bloated organisation more than it supports them. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? No? Councillor Bourke?

CR BOURKE: Thank you, Mayor. I think it's important to acknowledge that this is not an endorsement of the draft. It's just putting it out for public viewing. But in saying that, I won't be supporting that. I won't be supporting the rate rise that's in there and I think that we need to push for something a little bit better.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Bourke. Councillor Stapleton, do you have any closing remarks?

CR STAPLETON: I do have a couple of remarks, thanks, Mayor. Let's not forget the overarching governance principles of the Local Government Act which require us to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the Council. It is a

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core responsibility of Councillors to apply rigour and strategic thinking to our financial decisions. Applying a rate rise of anything less than the rate cap would be irresponsible and inconsistent with our obligation to plan for the long-term future of our entire municipality.

Anyone interested in the importance of this should make time to read through the recent monitor's report for Colac Otway Shire where the monitor explicitly discusses the issue of Councillors constraining rate revenue despite acknowledgment that the rate cap was below CPI. The report goes on to say that decisions around rates should not undermine the long-term sustainability of Council and its ability to meet its financial obligations or provide services for the community into the future. If Councillors want to attract the attention of a monitor, this would be a great way to go about it.

If you want to freeze rates, if you want to cut rates, you should also be required to declare what services you want to cut - road maintenance, child care, library services, is everything up for grabs? Maybe we would have to axe the proposed tree planting or Christmas decorations because the reality is that Council cannot reduce rates and continue to deliver the services, programs and infrastructure the community needs and asks for.

This is a Draft Budget that we know gives careful and detailed consideration to ensure long-term sustainability for Council to support the Surf Coast community and I implore my fellow Councillors to accept and endorse it for community consideration. For any ratepayers having trouble meeting rate payments, as Councillor Pattison said earlier, the hardship policy offers genuine relief measures, including payment plan options or deferrals. And I'll leave it at that. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton, and thank you, Councillors, for your speaking. We'll now put that matter to a vote. All those in favour? Thank you. And those against. Thanks, Councillors, so that's carried 4-3.

The next item, 4.3, is the 2025-29 Draft Revenue and Rating Plan. Is that meant to be 29 or is that meant to be 26, sorry? 29, sorry. Just checking - 2025-29 Draft Revenue and Rating Plan for Public Exhibition. The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement of the Surf Coast Shire Council Draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29 for the purpose of public exhibition. We have a recommendation. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Pattison - as per the recommendation?

CR PATTISON: Yes, as per the recommendation.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. And do we have a seconder? Councillor Stapleton, thank you. Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. So the Revenue and Rating Plan is going out for public exhibition, if it's endorsed at the meeting tonight, and we have heard at the question time earlier today a number of residents from our retirement villages having concern with what is put forward and quite an extensive conversation around the basis for the plan that's put forward, so I'll continue along on that same vein. So there will be - I also just wanted to clarify there will obviously be a lot more opportunity for hearing of submissions for people to put forward their views, which we look forward to in June around this Draft Revenue and Rating Plan.

So the Revenue and Rating Plan does not impact how much revenue Council raises from rates or other sources of revenue, because I think that wasn't clear in some of the questions that were put forward earlier. It's about how the rates are distributed amongst our ratepayers. So the plan sets out how the rating burden is distributed across different categories of ratepayers and how pricing is set for different fees and charges.

The previous rating plan was set out in June 2021 and there are no major changes proposed in this plan. There was extensive review done and we did have a number of workshops looking through that and it was decided - wasn't decided because it's decided here when it comes up to Council, but there was conversations around what would be an appropriate way to move forward on that with the recommendation from our officers that we can see in this report here.

So the plan is set up to determine the most appropriate, equitable and affordable revenue and rating approaches for the Surf Coast Shire and the document sets out all things around how rates are determined, collected and the basis for this. So those that are concerned with what's being put forward, I do encourage you to read this plan.

But basically the principles of equity, efficiency, simplicity, benefit, capacity to pay, sustainability and competitive neutrality were utilised in leaving it as it was, which is general rate of land is 100%, commercial industrial rates 190, and the farm rate is 75%. I know that this will not be received well by some and there's the potential for differential rate reducing the rateable dollar for the retirement villages. In particular, they'll consider perhaps and have some feedback when it comes to our hearing of submissions.

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I think it's really important to understand that there are many services that our Council provides for residents beyond the road maintenance at your front door or your individual street. For example, there's Positive Ageing Month activities, community education, including our Wiser Driver courses, libraries, support to our community houses, community grants, sports facilities. We have a number of wonderful exercise classes at our Wurdi Baierr Stadium. There are many varied supports that are not just the road maintenance of your footpath and your lighting that's directly at the front of your property and I think we all need to keep that in mind when there's conversations around equitable rating application.

As part of the consideration and development of this report, there was benchmarking across other Councils in our region. The City of Greater Geelong was part of that benchmarking as well as other relevant Councils in coming to this consideration.

I'd also like to note that pensioner rebates are available as well as the hardship policy if residents are finding it difficult to make ends meet in the context of the rates and the burden that is put through that and I really encourage people to take up this position and if they are struggling, then please get in touch with our officers. That's really important.

So once again, I encourage our Councillors to consider this fully. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Councillor Stapleton?

CR STAPLETON: I'll reserve my right to speak, thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Stapleton, under our Governance Rules, only the mover can reserve their right to speak.

CR STAPLETON: No, no, the seconder can too.

CR BODSWORTH: I'll check that with the Governance team.

CR STAPLETON: I don't mean to question your authority.

OFFICER: Based on my read, Mayor, I believe you're right, only the mover can reserve their right.

CR BODSWORTH: So speak now or forever hold your peace.

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CR STAPLETON: Thanks, Mayor. Look, I think Councillor Pattison has covered it really well. I'd just add that the Revenue and Rating Plan has been prepared in accordance with financial principles outlined in the Local Government Act. It's a draft plan. It will be placed on public exhibition and if people have further comments about it, they should take the time to read it and make those public submissions so they can be considered by Council in the future. Thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this item? Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: Yes. Mayor, tonight we had public questions from members of our community. They were heartfelt and I actually think they really have bona fide reasons for having a differential in their rates compared to other properties.

So, for that reason, not alone but for that reason, I won't be supporting this draft recommendation. I feel that it really portrays the Council as being heartless and also with what I've tried to advocate earlier with the farm rate changes as well, I can't support that either, particularly during a drought, and I feel as though the Council seems to be quite indifferent as well and uncaring, which is really sad. Given that it's 30 years of the Surf Coast Shire, I actually - I think tonight is a very sad night in the history of Council and local government.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak? Councillor Bourke?

CR BOURKE: Thank you, Mayor. Given that our previous motion has gone through, so our Draft Budget will be on display, I will be supporting this to go out in the - well, for good transparency.

I'm sympathetic to our retired committee. My husband and I owned a retirement village for 12 years and residents are like family, so I do think that issue needs to be explored further. It's obvious I don't support a full rate increase. However, I am aware that we've inherited a financial position that we need to work with.

So I'd be strongly urging the organisation, which already has some of the highest rates in the state, to look inward, see how we can cut back on things and as I campaigned with, get the basics that we need to do and do them well.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Bourke. Do any other Councillors wish to speak? Councillor Grist?

CR GRIST: Thank you, Mayor. While the information contained in this document is sound, I will not be endorsing it for public submission. As I mentioned earlier, I do not endorse a budget or a rating plan that does not provide a differential rate for retirement villages and forces those residents to pay rates for services and infrastructure they already pay for in their body corporate and service fees. I could only be persuaded to endorse this rating plan if the Draft Budget was to change to not implement a 3% rate rise across the board to every ratepayer. Thanks.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Grist. Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Yes, this plan aims to determine the most appropriate, equitable and affordable revenue and rating approach to apply in planning for funding objectives in the action plan.

As mentioned, we're in the last of this action plan and next year we're into our new action plan, which there will be a lot of new things coming out of that and I think we've got some great opportunities coming up to really work this into that. Again, emphasising this is a draft plan, so encouraging residents, ratepayers and everyone else to put forward their ideas and their thinking and put some submissions forward so we can actually consider what we heard tonight. Very emotive and some good reasoning behind around differential rates also, but also make sure you put in submissions so we can all consider everything on the table before anything is finalised. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Walker. And Councillor Pattison, are there any closing comments?

CR PATTISON: No closing remarks.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thank you. We'll now put that to the vote. All those in favour? Thank you, Councillors. And against? Thanks. And so that's carried 5-2.

The next item is item 4.4, the Urban Futures Strategy. The purpose of this report is to present the Urban Futures Strategy and supporting documents to Council for adoption. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Stapleton - as per the recommendation?

CR STAPLETON: Sure. Thanks, Mayor.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. And is there a seconder? Councillor Pattison, thanks. Councillor Stapleton?

CR STAPLETON: Thanks, Mayor. I'm happy to move this motion as per the recommendation, noting that there is some significant community interest in the outcome of this decision.

I'll start by talking about the Urban Futures Strategy itself, followed by a few comments in relation to the proposed Buckley Village concept. Firstly, the Urban Futures Strategy, otherwise referred to as the UFS. This is a really thorough document developed by strategic planners in partnership with technical experts, key stakeholders and community over the past two years. If supported, it will provide the overarching policy direction to guide decision making around sustainable urban growth in line with projected population growth across the Surf Coast Shire through to 2051. So it's a significant piece of work.

It's consistent with state planning direction which tells us that planning must limit urban sprawl and direct growth into existing settlements as well as protecting critical agricultural land and preserving the natural environment. Essentially, the UFS tells us where people will need to live and how Council can ensure there is adequate land supply with inbuilt measures to achieve this in a sustainable way, such as protection of significant environments, landscapes, waterways and biodiversity assets, as well as places of heritage significance.

It also includes key directions around environmentally sustainable design, creation of active and sustainable transport, and the necessary infrastructure to support planned growth. The strategy responds to the pressing issue of housing affordability and diversity in the Shire, with a key driver being the need to provide accommodation that supports households to change dwellings during various life stages.

There have been so many phases in the process for completion of the UFS, including the development of district profiles to identify key challenges and opportunities in each of the eight key locations across the Shire, a strategic assessment of bushfire risk across the municipality, multiple phases of community engagement, and technical assessments to look at growth projections as well as land supply and demand for both residential and industrial uses.



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Torquay and Winchelsea are identified in the plan as the two principal locations to accommodate future growth, primarily due to constraints of coastal and other rural townships as well as considerations such as bushfire risk and preservation of agricultural land and green open spaces.

Over the next 10 years or so, Torquay will continue to play a significant role in accommodating future growth, with approximately 65% of dwelling construction to occur within the Torquay town boundary over this time. After 2036, Winchelsea is expected to be the key location for future dwelling construction, with an estimated 59% of forecast growth to occur here under a moderate growth scenario.

The data tells us that Surf Coast will need an additional 8,000 dwellings by 2051 and the UFS indicates that this is achievable, utilising both infill and greenfill development. Looking at the Our Places part of the UFS, we can see the place-specific principles applied to locations and the further strategic work that's needed for detailed planning to accommodate the proposed growth in Torquay and Winchelsea.

The Upcoming Place Plan for Winchelsea to be developed in collaboration with the community will determine the appropriate level and location of growth to be accommodated there. There is also strategic work needed in Torquay for the preparation of the Messmate Road development area and to consider infill potential within the Torquay town centre as well as housing opportunities in the Baines Crescent precinct.

We know that all this detailed planning work is needed before Council can assess whether it is on track to achieve the number of dwellings required in Torquay and Winchelsea by 2051. We also know that these targets will be monitored and there will be opportunities to review and amend the strategic planning direction in future if needed.

Which brings me to the second part of my focus on this item in relation to the Buckley Village submission provided by Ample Investments. This is a bold and compelling concept, there's no doubt, and I'd really like to thank Gareth and Simon for the work they've done to develop this submission and for the information they've provided to Councillors. It's no secret that I'm an advocate for affordable housing and as a Council, we are committed to facilitating more social and affordable housing where possible. So it's been a lot to consider at a high level to reflect on and discuss.

We know the UFS analytical work does not indicate the need for a new town and we understand the importance of protecting farmland and rural

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landscapes. It is also recognised that growth outside of established towns and settlements is associated with higher infrastructure costs. Therefore, no new locations for significant growth outside of established towns have been included as potential opportunities in the UFS, which I know is frustrating to the proponents of this concept.

If the UFS is adopted, planners will be able to initiate the process for a Planning Scheme amendment, during which time there will be an opportunity for any stakeholders involved in the UFS process to make a submission to an independent planning panel. In effect, this is an opportunity for those who would like to have Council's strategy further scrutinised to present their ideas or submission to the planning panel.

We've been careful to follow a structured process that doesn't advantage or disadvantage any stakeholders and hopefully everyone close to it has recognised this. And I'll leave it there. Thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks. Councillor Pattison.

CR PATTISON: Thank you. So as we've heard from Councillor Stapleton, the UFS is an important strategic document that sets out how growth will be spread across our shire and how we can meet the State Government projected dwellings within our shire boundaries. It has been developed through extensive community consultation and over a number of years.

The UFS sets out how the projected growth requirements of our shire can be met predominantly in Torquay and Winchelsea. A key driver for the project was the change to the Torquay growth area framework brought about by the Distinctive Area and Landscapes Statement of Planning Policy. The SPP introduces protected settlement boundaries for all settlements within the declared area, including Torquay Jan Juc. The SPP will effectively limit the outward growth of Torquay Jan Juc's urban area and guide growth within the township.

Endorsing the UFS will enable officers to commence the process of incorporating the Strategic Framework Plan and key policy directions into the Surf Coast Planning Scheme through an amendment process. Following implementation into the Surf Coast Planning Scheme, the strategy will become the primary framework to guide urban growth in the Surf Coast Shire.

There are concerns raised around Buckley Village and the need to consider this as part of the Urban Futures Strategy, as Councillor Stapleton has also mentioned, around the need for affordable housing and those sorts of things

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and our Council is committed to affordable housing. We have the Affordable Accommodation Action Plan and there's lots of information on our website for those that are interested in how we are looking to do what we can within the remit of affordable accommodation.

But coming back to the UFS, the approach of the development of a new township is not supported by Plan Victoria state planning policy. Plan Victoria focuses on infill and increased density to deliver the growth outcomes for our communities. This limits urban sprawl, protecting our natural environment and creates vibrant townships.

Diversity of housing choice in Torquay and Winchelsea will deliver more affordable housing options, such as potentially townhouses or units in appropriate locations within those town centres. The identification of locations for new settlements is not supported by strategic planning policy at the state, regional or local level. Growth outside of established towns and settlements is associated with high infrastructure costs and has potential impacts on the environment and agriculture. Therefore, no new locations for significant growth outside of established towns has been included as a potential opportunity in this strategy.

The current land supply planned for Winchelsea and Torquay can accommodate the protections of required dwellings. However, over the next 5 to 10 years, if these projections change or the growth rates differ, then there could be avenues to revisit this strategy if it's required down the track.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? Councillor Grist.

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. Overall, I'm satisfied that the UFS provides a clear policy framework defining the future role of towns to guide land use planning. I appreciate it's being prepared over a three-year period and it's being shaped by community and stakeholder feedback along with expert technical assessments of forecast population and housing growth to 2051.

One hesitation I have in endorsing this strategic document is the Buckley Village proposal claims that they have been shortchanged in providing their submissions to Council and that timelines for the UFS have been brought forward, undermining their attempts to consult with and ultimately gain community support for their proposal.

I will accept that growth outside of established towns and settlements is likely associated with higher infrastructure costs and potential impacts, as has been

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discussed, on the environment and agriculture and with the officer advice that the current Plan Victoria document suggests that Council is likely to be responsible for funding any unplanned infrastructure costs for development located outside of identified growth towns, it appears the Buckley Village proposal may be a bit ahead of its time. Now I will trust that there will be periodic reviews every 5 to 10 years of this strategy regarding land supply and land release that will allow the Buckley Village proposal to continue to be considered in the future.

In relation to housing affordability, as outlined in the UFS, I have made it clear I do not support the use of our limited Council land for housing projects. Finally, this is a document I can live with, not love, but with the approval of the UFS, I look forward to the Winchelsea Place Plan being developed as this is a major development for the Winchelsea township that will hopefully see improved education and employment opportunities in that township.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Grist. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion?

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I did have a question just to clarify, when it comes to infill and Plan Victoria, we were briefed on this and I believe that in the metropolitan area 80% of new development is supposed to be infill and 20% greenfield, such as urban sprawl, and in rural and regional Victoria I just wonder if we know the actual percentage of what it's supposed to be.

CR BODSWORTH: Sure. I'm happy to refer that to the Acting CEO for an answer.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks, Mayor. It's a 70:30 principle, I understand, and there's recognition by the State Government that whilst challenging, that's easier to achieve in an urban setting like metro Melbourne and once you get into regional areas, that isn't a ratio that's achievable in all circumstances. But Plan Victoria does point to that aspiration towards consolidating urban form.

CR SCHONFELDER: Thank you very much. And I would like to speak, if I may, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Go ahead, please, Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: Oh, thank you very much. I said earlier I've been a Councillor in this Council for five years and I was a previous Councillor at the Shire of Barrabool for two years and I can honestly say that when it comes to planning, there's a lot to learn and it's a changing feast and I enjoy learning

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about planning and I know that I support having 20-minute communities where you have infrastructure, and Councillor Grist mentioned about Winchelsea about having education facilities and health facilities and it's worth noting that people - with population increasing in different areas, people go to where the jobs are. So having employment land is very important as well.

I do thank the Acting CEO for the information furnished about infill and the fact that it's 70:30 and I also note that the City of London hasn't grown, I think, in probably 70 years and it's interesting how City of London and Melbourne metropolitan area have areas that they can accommodate infill where there were previous industrial areas such as Fishermans Bend near the West Gate Bridge.

So I do thank the Council officers for the work they've done with the Urban Futures Strategy and I do on the whole agree with what my colleagues have said about different issues pertaining to this work. This is very high level and I do note that the Buckley Village proposal - I've been looking at a map and it's on page of the agenda - it's on page 204 and I look at the map of where Torquay and Jan Juc and the urban sprawl there and I know Winchelsea it's been said has possibly a 10,000 population and it has been also speculated having double that, or 18,000, and I just ask myself where would the sprawl go eventually, and if Winchelsea did have the same population as Torquay and Jan Juc, possibly it could include Buckley Village in the future.

I note that development should occur along railway lines. For the life of me, during my life so far, 50 years - I know I look much younger, Mayor, or we all do perhaps - I don't understand why development, more development hasn't occurred along railway lines to have a more sustainable society. But I'm glad also the First Nations people have been consulted and it's a big piece of work and it's taken three years. So I thank the Council officers once again and I'll be supporting this item. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this? Thanks, Councillor Walker.

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Yes, the strategy seeks to ensure that urban areas are well planned and to deliver sustainable communities. There's a clear policy framework to guide sustainable urban growth in the Surf Coast Shire, defining the future role of towns to guide land use planning of township increasing levels.

A lot of work has gone into this strategy over the last few years, with community consultation and technical reports and expert consultants. This

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helps with advocacy, also with supporting affordable housing and also knowing there's better public transport between and around towns and also highlights the different towns uses and protection around that too. So yes, I support this.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Walker. Any other Councillors? No. Councillor Stapleton, do you have any closing comments?

CR STAPLETON: Thanks, Mayor. There is so much more to the Urban Futures Strategy than what can be covered here tonight, but we do know from submissions that many key organisations and community groups and individuals have had an opportunity to read the strategy and the associated documents that sit with it and to have their say. Most were generally supportive, noting that there are real concerns by some about ongoing growth in Torquay and projections for Winchelsea.

In response to community submissions, the updated UFS that's being considered here tonight includes additional commentary, highlighting the importance of protecting waterways, biodiversity and ecological communities and recognising the need for environmental assessments and investigations to inform all future growth planning. The UFS outlines what can be done to try to ensure that growth is accommodated in a sustainable way to create healthy and connected communities.

Principle 2 of the document has been reworded and expanded to include reference to protection of significant biodiversity assets and additional directions were added which seek to avoid negative impacts of urban development and stormwater runoff on waterway systems and other receiving waters and to consider all relevant environmental investigations and assessments in preparing place plans, structure plans and precinct plans. Specific reference to integrated water management, water sensitive urban design and biodiversity sensitive urban design added to environmentally sensitive development principles in direction 4 and the context report updated to include descriptions and information relating to these principles should help to strengthen the environmental aspects of the UFS.

I think I've probably just about run out of time, but I will just also add that we received some really valuable feedback that's been used to strengthen the UFS, including the addition of a detailed implementation plan identifying future actions and proposed timing, which is really important. So thank you to everyone who provided input and to everyone for their contribution tonight. Thanks, Mayor.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thanks. We'll now put the motion to a vote. All in favour? Thanks, Councillors. It's carried unanimously.

We now move to item 4.5, SCS-003 Hardship Policy. The purpose of this report is to present the updated SCS-003 Hardship Policy (Attachment 1) to Council for adoption. We have a recommendation. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Pattison.

CR PATTISON: As per the recommendation.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Do we have a seconder? Councillor Walker, thanks. Councillor Pattison, would you like to speak to the motion?

CR PATTISON: Yes, I would, thank you. Given the cost of living pressures and the rising concern that people in our community are struggling to make ends meet, this policy is very important. I'm very grateful that we have reviewed and updated this to ensure it is current and applicable for residents and to enable ratepayers that are struggling financially to provide the supports that they need.

For those that can pay their rates, we need to do this to ensure a financially viable Council that continues to deliver the important services we all know and value. For those that are struggling, there are supports available and I encourage community members to have a look at the policy and get in contact with Council.

I think the sorts of things that come to mind are ageing members of our community that are asset rich and income poor, those going through financial hardship due to lost employment or domestic violence. In these instances, Council will assess on a case-by-case basis and develop a specific plan to address their hardship needs and whether that be deferral, payment plans or other measures to address those concerns.

It's important to note that interest will only be charged on overdue rates and charges if they are not subject to relief measures, so therefore if you are struggling, it's important to get in contact with Council early so that you don't accumulate unnecessary interest. In saying that, Council will proactively identify ratepayers and service users who may be experiencing hardship and/or financial hardship and to assist them in understanding the relief application process.

This policy balances the need to provide a fair, supportive and transparent approach to debt management and the need to ensure Council's ongoing



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financial viability with reliable cash inflows. So I really encourage our fellow Councillors to endorse and therefore adopt this hardship policy.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Yes, similar to what Councillor Pattison has just highlighted, there is various options for relief applications to make accessing support easier to reduce disadvantage with this policy. So given the cost of living crisis and everything that's happening at the moment, it's a great - not great, but it's a good policy to have in place and to make everyone aware of this policy that is available to ratepayers and everyone that needs it. So thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Walker. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this item? Councillor Grist.

CR GRIST: I'll be quick on this one. I endorse this document because the document is quite sound. However, the Council should note that the only way to reduce hardship is to eliminate, reduce or, at the very least, not increase the rates charged year on year. This document tackles none of those issues as it only delays payment of a tax amount forced on our community.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Grist. Councillor Bourke?

CR BOURKE: Thank you, Mayor. In my humble opinion, our ratepayers are in a cost of living crisis at the hands of a topdown government managed - like poor management of economics and policy, meaning that the idea that you can close down a state or a country or the globe for two years socially and economically and that would not result in some kind of absolute mental health and economic disaster is profoundly appalling to me.

So how do we become an effective part of cleaning up this mess within our limitations? To me, I don't feel like it's comforting the elderly saying, "It's okay, we can just pop it on your tab and when you die, your kids can pay us back out of your estate."

I will be supporting this policy, but I think we need to be very careful with how we manage this policy as well, noting that mental health is also a hardship, not just economics. The way people behave with their money during mental hardship will be a factor. So I'll be keeping an eye on it. We absolutely need it, so I support it.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Bourke. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the item? Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: Yes, I do concur with my colleagues with what they have said and, in particular, Councillor Grist as well because of all the different costs and the fact that the lack of public transport that exists in many areas of our shire, people have to spend more money travelling to work and just daily costs and weekly costs seem higher.

I know that I collect produce from Feed Me Torquay for my cows and once a week I go there and I've spoken to the volunteers there, who do a wonderful job. I also know people who help in Winchelsea as well with food relief there, record numbers of people.

I also know, touching on what Councillor Bourke said, that with mental health there are people who are too proud to help or too proud to ask for help and I know with COVID, dropping food off to some people when it was allowed, I did that because I felt that they were too proud to ask and some of them were quite elderly too and I just - I really feel with hardship I think it's actually going to increase. I'm not sure what the answer is. I think having reduced taxes and reduced costs is a possible practical answer. But I will be supporting this item.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the item? No? Are there any closing comments, Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: No closing comments, thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, we'll put that to the vote. All those in favour? Thanks, Councillors. That's carried unanimously.

Just noting the time, it's 5 to 8. I'm going to press on with item 4.6, Carbon Neutrality Program, and then perhaps we can take a break after that. The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement to cease carbon neutral certification and instead focus on reducing the organisation's actual greenhouse gas emissions and supporting the development of local carbon abatement projects. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Grist. What's your motion?

CR GRIST: I'd like to offer a different motion, if I could, please.

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CR BODSWORTH: Okay. I believe the Governance team has that and can display it.

CR GRIST: Shall I read that out, Mayor?

CR BODSWORTH: Yes, please.

CR GRIST: "That Council no longer seeks to obtain Climate Active certification as a carbon neutral organisation, with effect from 1 July 2025. Notes the 2025-26 Draft Budget allocation for the 2025-26 Carbon Neutrality Program is required to fulfil contractual obligations to purchase carbon offsets equal to the organisation's corporate emissions in 2024-25. Notes an updated emissions reduction strategy will be developed for Council's consideration in FY2026 in accordance with Council's adopted emissions reduction target and that except as required for the remaining duration of existing contractual obligations, only considers the redirection of funding from the carbon neutrality program to emissions reductions activities and carbon abatement projects once an updated emissions reduction strategy is implemented in 2026."

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Grist. And have all Councillors had a chance to take that in? Thanks. So do we have a seconder for that motion? Councillor Bourke.

CR BOURKE: Yes, thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Grist so far has not spoken to the motion --

CR BOURKE: Oh, sorry.

CR BODSWORTH: -- he's just read the motion, so I now invite Councillor Grist to speak to the motion.

CR GRIST: Thank you, Mayor. I wholeheartedly support exiting the Climate Active Certification Scheme and I am hopeful another million dollars of community funds won't be wasted on low-integrity carbon neutrality programs in the future. I can't, however, support all of the officers' recommendations listed on the original motion as it will continue to see money spent on emissions monitoring, officer time implementing new reduction strategies, and again giving other people money for new carbon abatement projects that may also potentially end up in low integrity and high cost.

My personal preference is to immediately cease all involvement in carbon neutral activities and programs. However, my alternate motion is a

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compromise and aims to see a robust and unbiased analysis of the merits of continuing any form of carbon neutrality program over the next 12 months with a clear strategy provided to Council before any further spending is authorised.

A central concern for Council should be that any new reiteration of a carbon neutrality program would still rely heavily on revenue from the Anglesea landfill, a revenue stream that is steadily declining and is set to cease entirely with the landfills in closure.

If the original motion is accepted, we would be locked into expensive programs with no sustainable funding source, forcing us to either cut back on other vital programs or dip into our limited cash reserves in the future. It should also be a concern to Councillors that this proposal including commitments to future spending has been brought to us before the Council plan and annual Budget have been developed and endorsed by us.

During our briefings on this item the officers highlighted that "being carbon neutral is no longer credible". That same briefing also described the carbon offset market as low integrity and high cost. So the question must be asked why are we being recommended to commit to spending on new and improved abatement strategies and schemes that could also end up being low integrity and high cost as the sector matures and best practice shifts yet again?

When the mechanisms of emissions reduction programs are already shown to be flawed, it's not unreasonable to question the integrity of the broader emissions reduction ideology. If offsets are also discredited, how long before the rest of this greenhouse gas agenda is similarly exposed as low integrity and high cost?

Are we willing to gamble - I modified my language there from earlier experience. Are we willing to gamble more money before that is realised as the consensus? I am not. Instead of pouring money into an increasingly questionable ideology focused on a trace gas, the alternate motion gives us the flexibility to fund real on-the-ground environmental projects on a case-by-case basis, projects that deliver visible meaningful outcomes in our communities. This could include initiatives like planting out the Winchelsea arboretum, enhancing the Moriac community network walking trails and the Lions Park, planting the Dean's Marsh arboretum, restoring the Karaaf Wetlands and supporting other local Landcare and tree planting efforts.

These aren't just box ticking exercises. They bring lasting beauty, biodiversity and community involvement to our towns. They can be delivered at a fraction

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of the cost, approved individually and funded responsibly, all without locking us into a major financial commitment before we've even completed our Council plan or this year's budget.

Supporting my alternative motion means choosing real, meaningful outcomes over expensive and ineffective symbolism. It's about putting community needs and financial responsibility first and, importantly, adhering to what this chamber endorses of maintaining good governance by not allowing the organisation to sidestep our Council plan and budget.

Fundamentally in the original motion we're being asked to invest in a program built around the idea of reducing a naturally occurring gas, carbon dioxide, which is essential for plant life. That's not science-based environmental action. That's fantasy dressed up as policy and that will always end up being low integrity and high cost. I urge you to vote for the alternative motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Grist. Councillor Bourke.

CR BOURKE: Thank you, Mayor. I second Joel's alternative motion, highlighting that the report from our officers included that best practice has evolved since the Climate Emergency Response Plan 2021-2031. Since that was developed, it's now widely acknowledged that emissions are difficult to measure with complete accuracy, offset projects may not capture as much carbon as their promoters claim, and carbon neutral claims are problematic when emissions and offsets are not accurately matched.

So this tells me that potentially and unwittingly we've wasted millions of dollars on something that potentially doesn't work. So I feel that the need to - I think also understand that our community - I don't think there would be any one person in our community who doesn't want to save our environment, particularly here on the beautiful Surf Coast.

So I think we owe them - if there is going to be any money spent, we owe them some real outcomes, real tangible ones, not fun gas killing tickets. So yes, I'll be supporting Joel's motion.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Bourke. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Councillor Stapleton.

CR STAPLETON: Thanks, Mayor. I'd actually like to foreshadow an alternate motion, which is the existing officer recommendation in our agenda report to cease the Climate Active Certification Program but to retain the funding for other future emission reduction activities.

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CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thank you, Councillor Stapleton.

CR STAPLETON: I'm just foreshadowing that and now I'll speak to the item.

CR BODSWORTH: Sure, go ahead.

CR STAPLETON: So the existing recommendation is much more consistent with Council's existing strategic direction and more aligned with the expectations of our community in terms of showing and delivering on environmental leadership. We know that as a Council we have a legal obligation to mitigate and plan for climate risks and it's imperative that we continue on our path to do everything possible to reduce emissions.

Importantly, our community demands a clear commitment from Council that it will demonstrate this environmental leadership. It was clearly articulated through the recent community panel process, Our Focus Our Future, where two of the eight principles that the panel developed focused on the need for Council to prioritise investment and action to protect environment and manage impacts of climate change.

I'm willing to support the recommendation to stop the climate active certification as per the officer report, but there is no way that I would consider supporting a motion like the one that is being proposed that fails to include continued investment to support Council's ongoing goals to reduce carbon emissions.

This proposed motion also removes reference to development of local carbon abatement projects and fails to include the need for measurement and reporting of Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions, which would enable the organisation to identify where operations are generating the most emissions and to target mitigation strategies to those areas with the biggest impact, which is really important.

Stepping away from the carbon offset program should not be viewed as an opportunity to step away from our commitment to climate action, mitigation and adaptation. I find it outrageous to think that we're in a declared climate emergency and some might think it's okay to cease allocation of funding for the critical work needed to help address this.

To suggest that we need to wait for the updated emissions reduction strategy before continuing with our ongoing allocations of these funds is erroneous. Surf Coast Shire Council recognises the global climate crisis and the need for

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urgent action and we have a Climate Emergency Response Plan that was developed with a 10-year horizon, so the strategic justification for this investment is already in place.

Again, there is a need for Councillors to be clear about our role. It's up to us to set the strategic direction of Council, which we have already done through our declaration of a climate emergency and adoption of the Climate Emergency Corporate Response Plan, which includes a commitment to reduce corporate greenhouse gas emissions.

Look, the proposed motion could easily result in officers needing to present individual funding bids for every activity or project that's identified with the emissions reduction strategy. This is getting very operational. As a governing body, we should be seeking to provide directional guidance rather than asking officers to bring every spending decision to Council.

So I'm out of time. I'll leave it there for now. Thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: My understanding, Mayor, is that the direction that Councillor Grist is espousing is more practical measures of planting trees and he actually did specify different examples, such as a creek in Moriac, and I just feel that with the population growing on the Surf Coast - I know this is referring to the organisation this item and this alternative motion, but with the population growing on the Surf Coast and growing in Victoria, we're told that we're supposed to, in theory, reduce our emissions, but how can we when the population is growing? I feel as though the population is the elephant in the room in relation to this and I think population is a very serious matter.

I know at Buckley I've attended tree planting there and I know my parents in the 1960s planted hundreds of trees because they love trees prior to Landcare and I know the Landcare and Rivercare groups have participated in revegetation as well and I know there are members of the Winchelsea community here tonight who have been very involved with that.

I also know that from the First Nations perspective, there were many more swamps and wetlands that existed and they have been drained and land has been reclaimed and I think that this is a very big subject and a big argument. Restoring wetlands is something that we should be doing.



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So I feel as though it's very pragmatic where this is coming from and I can appreciate what Councillor Stapleton has said, but I feel the community want practical and they want to see what's happening with the improvements we want to make for the environment. And I know Councillor Bourke has said that everyone wants to have a much better environment that we cherish. We all feel the same way. So I'll be supporting the alternative motion, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor, and thanks for everyone's comments. I think we're all on the same page as in we all want to live in a beautiful place and have environment that's sound and is going to be there for the future, but we know that it's not the reality of where we live and we've just come off the hottest year on record. So regardless of if you're a climate denier or not, things are happening beyond our control that we can try to reel back in. So I'm really looking forward to the emissions reduction strategy next year regardless of whatever outcome comes out of this and I think that will help set the strategy forward for what we can really do there.

Our focus should continue to reduce the organisation's operational greenhouse gas emissions and supporting development of local carbon abatement projects. Some of the projects as what Joel pointed out could be that answer, but I think that will really come out in a new reductions strategy.

As part of that, we've got to look at the emissions and support the development of local abatement projects with environmental, social and economic co-benefits. It's something that's on everyone's mind. It's also coming out in the Council plan around this side of things too. There has been trust lost in the credibility of carbon neutral claims, but that's where we've really got an opportunity where we can bring it back in to see some really local offsets that we can do locally and tangible.

So I'll be supporting the original motion so we can actually get some things going, but also really support getting the emissions reduction strategy out as quick as we can so we can - not as quick as we can, but get it out there so the public and everyone can get some real things going. Thanks.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thank you, Councillor Walker. And Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. I'm seeking my fellow Councillors to vote down this motion and support the foreshadowed motion outlined by Councillor

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Stapleton. That will be what I will be doing. The motion before us does not go far enough to address emission reduction and climate action.

The money allocated - looking at the current motion that's put forward, the money allocated in the 25-26 Budget will retrospectively fund the 24-25 carbon neutral program and that's consistent across both. Delaying allocating budget until the emission reduction strategy is finalised is very likely to result in a backward step on addressing climate action. The finalisation of the strategy may not allow time to allocate the required dollars to deliver on the strategy in the 26-27 Budget.

The motion that is being put forward has no commitment to support the continued measurement and reporting of the organisation corporate greenhouse gas emissions to a high standard. That is not acceptable. Our community expects more and I expect more. Climate change is real and we need to be doing all that we can to address it.

It is very important that our Council continues down the path of addressing the climate emergency because this has not gone away. As was just identified by Councillor Walker, it's the hottest year on record, so we can see these climate change impacts every day in our world.

It is therefore important to direct funds previously allocated to the carbon neutrality program towards activities that further reduce emissions and deliver local carbon abatement outcomes. There is 12 months to work through where and what these will be and this will be resolved prior to the 26-27 Budget process. There is adequate governance arrangements through that Budget process to ensure that the money will be allocated appropriately.

Directing funds previously allocated to the carbon neutrality program towards activities that further reduce emissions and deliver local carbon abatement outcomes is something that I think all of us think is important. Our community expects that our Council prioritise protecting our natural environment and therefore addressing climate change. Taking a backward step on emission reduction is not acceptable.

Just for some tangible emission reduction activities, real tangible outcomes, I'd like to point out some of the things that have been done over the years as part of this program. So 784 kilowatts of solar and 92 kilowatt hours of battery storage installed on Council facilities; 100% renewable electricity for Council operations through the Victorian energy collaboration, saving Council \$173,000 in the first two years through reduced utility bills; transitioning Council-owned

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street lights to LED; introducing FOGO, that's food and organics waste collection, to divert organic material from landfill and our landfill when it's full of FOGO results in significant emission creation, so by diverting that, we are reducing future emissions from our landfill; energy efficiency and electrification, that's gas removal works across Council's facilities; and beginning to electrify Council's fleet and plant changing from petrol to electric, just to name a few. Thanks for the little bit of extra time.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Councillor Grist, do you have any closing comments?

CR GRIST: I will, thanks, Mayor, yes. So the reports from our officers included that best practice has evolved since the Climate Emergency Response Plan was developed. It is now widely acknowledged that emissions are difficult to measure with complete accuracy, offset projects may not capture as much carbon as their promoters claim, and carbon neutral claims are problematic when emissions and offsets are not accurately matched.

But let's look a bit closer at what we're trying to negate here. Carbon dioxide is a trace gas in the atmosphere currently sitting at approximately 419 parts per million, or 0.04% of the atmosphere by volume. Despite its small concentration, it's often framed as the driving force behind climate change.

Human-caused emissions from fossil fuel combustion and land use change make up only 3% of total annual carbon dioxide emissions worldwide. (Indistinct) to Australia, our country contributes approximately 1.2% of global human-caused carbon dioxide emissions, emitting around 410 to 470 million tonnes per year, depending on the accounting year. Even assuming the higher-end figure of 470 million tonnes, it remains a small fraction of global emissions, yet we are being legislated to take on disproportionate economic burdens.

At our local government level, the Surf Coast Shire's operational emissions are reported as 15,000 tonnes, which is less than 0.003% of national emissions and essentially negligible at the global scale. So here's the question, if we are responsible for 0.000000004% of global emissions, why are we preparing to invest \$1 million over the next four years on programs that aim to reduce a fraction of a fraction of a trace gas when that same money could deliver visible local and measurable benefits?

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. We will now put that motion to a vote. All those in favour? Thank you. And against? And that motion is lost

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3-4, which means that Councillor Stapleton, you are able to put your foreshadowed motion. Do you have a question, Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I would like to move that we suspend Standing Orders to have a break, please.

CR BODSWORTH: Look, Councillor Schonfelder, I appreciate that, but I'd prefer to finish our two debates on this item first. So sorry, but we'll keep going.

CR SCHONFELDER: I'll have to excuse myself briefly then.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thanks. Sorry to disappoint. Councillor Stapleton, you are now able to put your foreshadowed motion.

CR STAPLETON: Thanks, Mayor, and just to be clear, the foreshadowed motion is the recommendation that is in the report item 4.6 on the carbon neutrality program.

I'm willing to support this recommendation to stop the climate active certification as per the officer report, but want to make it really clear that stepping away --

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Stapleton, I'm really sorry, I omitted to get you a seconder for your motion. Thanks to the Acting CEO for reminding me and I'm really sorry to --

CR STAPLETON: That's okay, I can start again.

CR BODSWORTH: So I'm looking for a seconder for Councillor Stapleton's motion. Councillor Walker, thank you. I'm really sorry about that. You can continue.

CR STAPLETON: That's okay, Mayor. It gives me another moment to start.

So I'm willing to support the recommendation to stop the climate active certification program as per the officer report, but want to make it clear that stepping away from the carbon offset program should not be viewed as Council stepping away from our commitment to climate action mitigation and adaptation.

For many years, Council has shown leadership and a strong commitment to the reduction of emissions, but I recognise that officers have identified that there

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is evolving best practice in carbon neutral certification and that funds should be redirected away from purchasing non-local international offsets and to shift the focus to local carbon abatement projects. This does not suggest funding for emission reductions should be suspended, simply redirected.

For those in doubt about the importance of this ongoing funding allocation, please follow the science. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that rapid and deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions are required to limit global warming within safe limits for ecosystem function and for human health. To be honest, I'm concerned that in this day and age I even need to state this fact.

Councillor Pattison has outlined some of the emission reduction activities that were undertaken over the last Council term outside of the carbon offset program through which we achieved significant emissions reductions and have been able to reduce non-landfill emissions by 41% since 2020. Why would anyone want to risk stalling this important ongoing work?

The decision to offset corporate emissions to achieve certified carbon neutral status was informed by best practice at the time, which was to offset emissions that can't be eliminated, like those from the Anglesea landfill. Achieving the requirements of carbon neutral certification relied on Council purchasing a majority of international offsets to meet the quantity required within a limited budget.

More recently we know that international carbon offsets have been subject to increasing scrutiny and reputational risk. Unfortunately, with the Anglesea landfill being the largest source of emissions in the shire, it is not possible at this time to completely eliminate all greenhouse gas emissions from Council's operations. However, the goal remains to do everything we can to reduce them. If non-local offset programs are no longer considered best practice, we must do what we can to identify local carbon abatement projects or to work with others in our region to create a market for them.

We know the allocation of \$240,000 is required in the upcoming Budget to cover our existing commitment to offset carbon emissions retrospectively. We also know that planning for next year's budget will commence towards the end of this year and we need to provide reassurance for our community that we remain committed to environmental leadership and climate change action and that associated emissions reductions activities will continue to be prioritised.

Redirecting the \$240,000 to initiatives that reduce the organisation's actual emissions and to identify local carbon offset initiatives aligns with Council's

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strategic direction to tackle the climate challenge and I urge my fellow Councillors to show leadership in this space. Thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton. Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor, and thank you, everyone, for their input.

I've thought long and hard around this sort of decision that's come forward and I think at the end of it, we're all on the same page around getting this strategy right so we can actually get some good tangible outcomes going for our community, but also as Council we need to lead by example with what we're doing and hopefully the public come on board with that too. With the strategy, I'd like to see a bit more not just around what Council is doing, but what we can do with our community to activate them to see how they can help reduce their input too and offset.

And again just reiterating what's happened around the world around climate, you know, fires in the States in the middle of winter and snow dumps up north in the Northern Hemisphere, very unusual, but it's not unusual but at the same time, we need to address that there is climate change and we need to be a leader in that locally and in the world if we can. Thanks.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Walker. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Councillor Pattison.

CR PATTISON: Thank you. I think a lot of the conversation has been covered in the prior motion, but I want to confirm that I will be supporting this motion. It commits to spending the same dollars that was allocated to the carbon neutral program, certification program, to other carbon emission reduction programs, which I'm supportive of. I want to ensure that our Council is not going backwards on its commitments to addressing climate change and emissions reduction.

Council is committed to steadily eliminating emission sources from its operations to date and has reduced non-landfill emissions by 41% since the financial year 2020 to 2021 and I've already listed those tangible emission reduction activities that have been completed to date, so I won't take up people's time listing them out again, but there's lots of great work that our climate emergency action team have been doing to address climate change.

Also one of the exciting opportunities which is the sorts of things that our local offset programs are looking to be involved with through the Barwon South West Climate Alliance, of which Council is a member, the Corangamite

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Catchment Management Authority is developing a local offset program focussed on aligning projects with waterway health and waterway and wetland blue carbon opportunities in the region. So the timelines and costs remain uncertain, but it's anticipated establishment of the program in the next three to five years.

So these are some really great opportunities. I think Graham in his question was identifying some other potential great opportunities and it will be really exciting to progress these local opportunities through what's happening with this motion. So thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Pattison. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? Councillor Grist.

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. So some of the solutions that were offered were solar panels and electric vehicles for the organisation. The suggestion that these are the ultimate solution to our environmental challenges is, frankly, both misinformed and ethically problematic.

Let's look at the facts. China currently dominates the global production of solar panels, EV batteries and related technologies, controlling over 80% of the solar panel market, yet much of this manufacturing is powered by Australian coal and gas, fuelling a supply chain that is far from green.

The mining required to extract coal and rare earth minerals for these technologies involves heavy industrial machinery, burning up to 30 gallons of diesel per hour per machine. These raw materials are then shipped across the globe on cargo vessels burning heavy fuel oil, one of the dirtiest fuels in existence. Just one ship emits more sulfur in a single day than 58 million cars emit in a full year. And remember it takes 22 to 26 days to reach China by ship and then the panels and EVs must also be shipped back here for a total averaging 44 to 52 days of the dirtiest emissions possible per ship, with estimates of 26,000 total trips per year. And of course further refining and material production chews up even more energy.

Beyond the environmental cost is a deeply troubling ethical dimension. It is well documented that Uyghur forced labour used in Xinjiang Province to produce the poly silicons required in solar panels. Meanwhile, mining operations in parts of Africa supplying raw materials to China are often associated with child labour and human rights abuses.



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Given these realities, I cannot in good conscience support the use of our public funds to subsidise or promote solar panels and EVs produced under such conditions. This is not a clean solution. It's a dirty and unethical illusion.

I'm right behind pursuing truly sustainable, low-cost and morally responsible outcomes for our environment, but these must also have a commitment to human dignity. I support delivering tangible benefits to our community, not chasing ideological vanity projects and I'd like us to start funding initiatives that actually make a difference on the ground and that sit within our core remit.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the item?

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I wondered whether an amendment could be put forward to the mover and seconder and that is that procurement be local within the jurisdiction of Victoria - whether that would be suitable to the mover and the seconder, just having heard what Councillor Grist said.

CR STAPLETON: No.

CR BODSWORTH: I'm happy to put that to the mover and the seconder.

CR STAPLETON: No. Thanks for the suggestion, but no. I think we need to wait to see what the emissions reduction strategy is, but I won't get into the debate because you're just putting it forward at the moment.

CR WALKER: I agree. I think we need to get the emissions reduction strategy going and in place, which that could be part of that input that we could put into that side of things, the strategy at a later date, I think.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I would like to speak on this item and I won't move the amendment because I can see that it probably won't be supported in the majority. So in the interests of saving time, I won't move that amendment.

But I will say that with what Councillor Grist has said tonight we've heard reports about child labour around the world. Out of sight is out of mind and I just feel that, to be honest, with the federal election taking place at the moment, we hear about being more environmentally friendly, but we export so much coal and we export so many resources overseas and it's almost as if wherever it's exported to is polluted and not here and I feel as though there is a moral obligation that we have and that does raise moral questions.

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I am concerned with solar power about what happens at the end of life with them and how environmentally friendly that is as well. So I actually would like more practical initiatives made as far as planting more trees and restoring wetlands. So I can't support this item, I'm afraid, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay. Thank you, Councillor Schonfelder. Councillor Bourke?

CR BOURKE: Yes, I've been grappling on whether I sort of bring this up or not, but - and this is from a - it's a left of field perspective anyway. So in a psychological context, people can be very drawn into doing things that they feel is right, even if it's wrong, as some of our officers have pointed out to us. Emissions and offsets are not accurately matched. They're problematic. To keep beating down that path seems quite bizarre to me.

And again, just from a mindset perspective, it's almost like a toxic compassion. So people who have really good, kind intentions are persuaded to enforce ideas, costs and ideologies onto others in order to seem compassionate or look compassionate or any of that kind of stuff. It can really overwhelm a person's whole identity. And this is where it turns into a bit of a tyrannical toxic compassion.

So we've all agreed that we all want to look after our environment and that we will do anything logical that actually gives us results to do that, but I think to still kick this can of - this ideology that is daily being unravelled is not good governance and it's not good spending.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Bourke. So Councillor Stapleton, do you have any closing comments?

CR STAPLETON: Yes, I'll say a couple of things. Thanks, Mayor.

Look, there's been much discussion tonight, which I think is distracting from the real issue here. We are living through a climate emergency and reducing emissions is not something that I think should be up for debate at a time when, given everything we know about our changing climate, we must be showing real leadership with an explicit focus on emissions reduction.

Councillors who have taken the time to read the community panel report that was completed only last month as part of the current Council plan process will know that our community expects clear and strong leadership from Council on the environment and on climate action. The report clearly states that environmental impact needs to be at the forefront of Council considerations

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and decision making. It also states that Council decisions must be informed by the latest scientific consensus on climate change and that Council must follow these findings.

Now is not the time to back down on our climate change action. Now is the time to step up and do more. Each of us has a responsibility to do everything we can to secure a safer climate for future generations. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Stapleton. We'll now put that motion to a vote. All in favour? And against? Thank you, Councillors. That motion is carried 4-3.

So I'm now looking for a procedural motion to suspend Standing Orders so we can take a break. Moved by Councillor Pattison, seconded by Councillor Grist. All in favour? Thank you. We'll have a break for - well, 8.45 we'll come back, thanks - just under 15 minutes.

(Short break)

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, so Councillor Walker and Councillor Schonfelder. Thank you. All in favour? Okay, we've resumed the meeting. Councillor Pattison is out of the room at the moment. If we can just minute that Councillor Stapleton has had to leave the meeting and offers her apologies.

So we'll go on with item 4.7, Open Space and Civil Operations Service Level Agreement Review. The purpose of this report is to present the revised Open Space Operations Service Level Agreement to Council for adoption and to provide Council with the findings of the Open Space and Civil Operations Service Level Agreement Review. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Grist, thank you. As per the recommendation?

CR GRIST: Yes, it is.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks. And a seconder? Councillor Schonfelder, thanks. Councillor Grist, would you like to speak to the motion?

CR GRIST: I would, thank you. This is 62 pages of well-constructed analysis, but the important pages for the community and Council are the opportunities and recommendations for improvement on pages 52 to 55. I believe they are all commonsense improvements, most at no cost, which is very pleasing. However, I would task the organisation that if recommendation 01B to create a new open space maintenance officer role at a cost of \$98,000 is to occur, then

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an equivalent savings in payroll be found elsewhere in the organisation. Also, can I add to recommendations C11 and C12 if the street sweeper service should be the subject of an independent review, can we assess the service level agreement of road shoulders of popular cycling routes to ensure debris is removed for safe and puncture-free cycling?

I would also recommend the community leave the appended summary of current defects, intervention levels and response times to see when and how quickly Council will respond to a request for service. Overall, I'm very happy to endorse this report.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Grist. Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: I'm very happy to second the report and I'd just like to make a comment that perhaps in the future, given the bee situation that bees are endangered, having possible mass plantings of flora, perhaps even flora that could be beneficial to bees, is something that perhaps should be looked at in the future. So I thought I'd just make that comment. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Schonfelder. I'm just welcoming Councillor Pattison back into the room. We're on item 4.7, Open Space and Civil Operations Service Level Agreement Review and we've heard from Councillor Grist and Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak? Councillor Walker.

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. The review (indistinct) the existing level of service and identifies opportunities for improvement and efficiencies to provide the best possible value for Council's chosen level of investment. This does. As Joel Grist, Councillor Grist, pointed out, it's over 60 pages. It gives really good transparency and clarity around what we do and how it's achieved. So yes, I'll be supporting this.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Walker. Do any other Councillors wish to speak? Thank you. Does Councillor Grist have any closing comments?

CR GRIST: No, thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thanks, Councillors. We'll put that to a vote. All in favour? Thanks. That's carried unanimously.

Item 4.8, Internal Resolution Procedures. The purpose of this report is to present internal resolution procedures to Council for adoption and to advise Council of the internal appointment of a Councillor Conduct Officer. We have a

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recommendation. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Pattison - as per --

CR PATTISON: As per the recommendation.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. And a seconder? Councillor Schonfelder, thanks. So Councillor Pattison, would you like to speak to the motion?

CR PATTISON: Sure. I think it's really important to clarify how to resolve disputes between Councillors and this internal resolution procedure clearly does that and outlines the expectations and actions required when there are issues that need to be resolved between Councillors.

The procedures are designed to be the first step for dealing with an alleged breach of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct. It's noted that while Councillors who are alleging a breach of the Model Code may instead choose to apply directly for internal arbitration, the principal councillor conduct register will reject such an application if it does not demonstrate an adequate reason why steps have not been taken to resolve the matter. So it really is seeking internal resolution of matters and I think it makes a lot of sense.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Prior to October 2024, Councils were required to develop and adopt their own Code of Conduct at the start of each Council term. Following reform across the sector, a Model Councillor Code of Conduct was implemented and this actually makes financial sense and saves many Councils or all Councils money. As this statewide Code of Conduct applies, I think it really works well in relation to that. So I welcome this item. Thank you, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? Councillor Grist?

CR GRIST: Just quickly, I'm happy that item 5.4 has been improved to allow for conciliation to be performed by a person jointly chosen by the parties involved and I hope we never have to utilise these rules of engagement.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? No? Are there any closing comments, Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: No.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. We'll put that to a vote. All in favour? Thanks, Councillors. That's carried unanimously.

4.9, Award of Contract T25-006 Fuel Charge Card Services. The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to award Contract T25-006 Fuel Charge Services. As the recommendation was redacted for the agenda, can officers please share the unredacted version on the screen before we proceed?

So Councillors, we have the recommendation there. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Schonfelder? As per the recommendation? Thank you. And a seconder? Thanks, Councillor Grist. Councillor Schonfelder, would you like to speak to the motion?

CR SCHONFELDER: I'd just like to say that in relation to the Municipal Association of Victoria, it really makes sense sector wide to work together to try and cut costs and save costs. So I know there's a specific term for that and it escapes me at the moment, but I believe it's important to be clever and to try and be as frugal as possible in this current environment that we are experiencing. Thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Councillor Grist?

CR GRIST: Nothing to add, thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thanks. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this motion? No. Thank you. We'll put it to a vote. All in favour? Thanks, Councillors, that's carried unanimously.

4.10, Project Budget Adjustments and Cash Reserve Transfers - April 2025. This report contains proposed project budget adjustments and cash reserve transfers for Council approval. The report presents adjustments including existing projects requiring adjustment, project closures, new projects to be initiated, Chief Executive Officer-approved transfers under delegation or corrections to prior reports presented to Council. We have a recommendation. Does anyone wish to move a motion?

CR SCHONFELDER: I'm happy to.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Councillor Schonfelder. Do I have a seconder? Councillor Grist, thank you. Councillor Schonfelder.

CR SCHONFELDER: I'm happy to reserve my right to speak, thank you.

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CR BODSWORTH: Okay. Councillor Grist?

CR GRIST: Can I just ask a question on one of the items?

CR BODSWORTH: Sure, what's your question?

CR GRIST: The project name is Ocean Views Barwon Water Reserve. I'm just not sure what that's about. Could that be explained a bit?

CR BODSWORTH: Okay. I'll just ask the Acting CEO to give us a bit of a rundown.

MR CHRIS PIKE: Thanks. Through you, Mayor. This project was identified in the Torquay Jan Juc DCP, so dating back quite some time. There's a lineal easement reserve managed by Barwon Water grass, I think about 20 metre wide grass not actually a pathway, it's just a thoroughfare at the moment that runs through that estate and the DCP had the concept of putting a path in there so that you could traverse that by a bike or a little bit more safely on foot, as opposed to a slightly longer route, and this is being proposed for returning the funds so parking the project for the moment, subject to the next review of the DCP because Barwon Water have indicated that Council would have to take on management responsibility for that entire lineal reserve because of the kind of increased maintenance requirements it would have because of the presence of a concrete path where currently there's just grass.

So on that basis, and knowing that there are other routes - a little bit longer, but you can still get from A to B - this is being parked with a decision to hold those funds and then make a decision at a later date as to whether Barwon Water's position has changed or whether Council has an appetite to take on additional annual maintenance expenditure to provide the path or not.

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks. So Councillor Grist, do you wish to speak to the motion?

CR GRIST: No, I'm fine, thanks.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Do any other Councillors want to speak to this motion? Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: I'll just let people know the project budget adjustments presented in the report are there for transparency for our community to see the changes from what was allocated for a project, whether there's returned projects or like the question of Councillor Grist, a project is no longer



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progressing and the money is going back to the source. So it's transparency for community to see how the money is moving on projects.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Pattison. So Councillor Schonfelder, do you have any closing comments?

CR SCHONFELDER: No, thank you.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. So we'll put that to a vote. All those in favour? Thanks. That's carried unanimously.

Item 4.11, Election Report - 2024 Local Government Elections. The purpose of this report is to present the Election Report for the 2024 local government elections to Council. We have a recommendation. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Councillor Walker. Is that as per the recommendation?

CR WALKER: Yes.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. And a seconder? Councillor Schonfelder, thanks. Councillor Walker, do you want to speak to the motion?

CR WALKER: Yes, I can't believe it's been six months since this all happened, so I think we're all finding our feet now as a new Council. I look forward to the next three and a half years.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Yes, I'd like to say that time - they say time flies while you're having fun, but I just once again would like to congratulate my colleagues who were re-elected and the new colleagues that were elected, and just reflecting on Councillor Walker's comments, I'm looking at my colleagues wondering how many grey hairs they have because prior to being elected to the Surf Coast Shire, I don't think I had any grey hairs and now I do have some more.

But I'd just like to also say that the Government of Victoria, the State Government has a motto Peace and Prosperity and I know that when you look at the world at the moment with the troubles that are happening, I think we should give thanks that we live in a democracy and we live in a fairly prosperous society and I think it's something to be very thankful for. And that's all, thank you, Mayor.

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CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Schonfelder. Do any other Councillors wish to speak? Councillor Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. Just for anyone that's interested and cares about democracy and wants to understand how the election is carried out, the number of votes that - or the proportion of our community that voted or didn't vote, all of those sorts of things are covered off in this report. So it gives you a really good - it's a very thorough process and it's quite interesting to understand all of those ins and outs of running an election, how it's done. And then the voting and obviously the results, so it's interesting around primary votes, preferencing, all of those sorts of things are all outlined in this report so you can get a really good understanding of, you know, the election itself. One minor point is obviously you end up with Councillors, but really the report is around the process of democracy and the process of the election. The rest is about the actual results itself.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you, Councillor Pattison. Do any other Councillors wish to speak to this one? No. Thank you. Are there any closing comments, Councillor Walker?

CR WALKER: No, thanks.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. So we'll put that to a vote. All in favour. Thanks, that's carried unanimously.

4.12, Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation - Planning and Environment Act 1987. The purpose of this report is to seek Council's appointment of authorised officers under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 through the updated Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation (the Instrument). This instrument requires updating due to recent staff changes. We have a recommendation. Do we have a motion? Yes, Councillor Schonfelder. As per the recommendation? Thank you. And a seconder? Councillor Grist, thanks. Councillor Schonfelder, do you wish to speak to this?

CR SCHONFELDER: I would like to note the work that the officers do and congratulate them on their respective appointments.

CR BODSWORTH: Okay, thank you. Councillor Grist?

CR GRIST: Nothing to add, thanks, Mayor.

CR BODSWORTH: Do any other Councillors wish to speak? No, thanks. We'll put it to a vote. All in favour? Thank you. That's carried unanimously.

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4.13, Conflict of Interest Records. The purpose of this report is to present conflict of interest records received since the previous Council meeting. We have a recommendation. Do we have a motion? Thanks, Councillor Pattison.

CR PATTISON: As per the recommendation.

CR BODSWORTH: Thank you. And a seconder? Councillor Schonfelder, thanks. Councillor Pattison, do you wish to speak to the motion?

CR PATTISON: No.

CR BODSWORTH: Councillor Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: No.

CR BODSWORTH: Do any other Councillors wish to speak to the motion? Thanks. We'll put that to a vote. All in favour? Thanks, that's carried unanimously.

And that brings us to the end of the open public section of our report, so we'll just take a moment to switch off the live stream and to say goodbye to our gallery members. Thank you, Jill. And we need a mover and a seconder to move into confidential or to close the meeting to the public. Thanks, Councillor Walker and Councillor Pattison. Thanks. All in favour? Thanks. And against? Okay, thank you.

So the procedural motion - sorry, it was moved by - I moved too quickly even for myself. It was moved by Councillor Pattison, seconded by Councillor Walker. So now I'll ask for votes for and votes against. Okay, so that's carried 4-2. So we are now in confidential.