

Council happenings . . .

with Mayor
Glenn Wall

Council's Water and Sewer Operations.

The decision has been made to undertake further negotiations with Hunter Water Corporation regarding the complete takeover of Council's water and sewer operations.

Council consulted the community about three possible options through public meetings and a survey, which was mailed out to water and sewer customers and advertised in this newspaper. Some 864 survey forms were returned, with the majority (53%) supporting Option 3. Results were as follows:

Option 1 – Retain the current Dungog Shire Water & Sewer model (26% support).

Option 2 – Dungog Shire Consolidated Water & Sewer Model (20% support).

Option 3 – Transfer the Water & Sewer Business to Hunter Water (53% support).

On behalf of council I would offer thanks to those who participated in this survey.

Aspects for further negotiation with Hunter Water Corporation include the impact upon Council's finances from lost overheads, continuing local employment, use of local contractors, and concerns about transferring assets without financial compensation.

Whilst Hunter Water has offered contributions of \$150,000 annually for the first three years to assist council with adjustments, there will be significant long term implications upon infrastructure and services because we stand to lose about \$260,000 annually in overheads from water and sewer operations.

The Hunter Water option will in most cases result in a significant reduction in rates to Dungog Shire customers. However, about \$7 million in the book value of water assets and over \$4 million in the book value of sewer assets including consolidated cash reserves of \$2.5 million for asset renewals would be transferred to Hunter Water at nil cost.

Whilst this would in part be balanced with current debts of approximately \$390,000 in water and \$252,000 in sewer, and the need for significant upgrades to some of the infrastructure, no compensation has been offered to Council for the transfer of assets.

Council is very mindful of the likely impacts of these matters upon all ratepayers rather than just water and sewer customers. The negotiations with Hunter Water Corporation will take place as soon as possible in order for the Clarence Town sewerage scheme to be constructed without further delay.

NSW Police Community Forum.

Council in conjunction with the Dungog Chronicle, Rotary and the Dungog District Chamber of Commerce have invited the Lower Hunter Local Area Commander, Superintendent Des Organ to a public Forum to discuss issues related to the recent spate of vandalism and other Police related matters. **This Forum will be held at the James Theatre, Dungog, at 6.30 pm on Tuesday, 13th November, 2007.**

All Shire residents are encouraged to attend. The Forum will provide an ideal opportunity for people to ask questions and find out what initiatives are being considered to combat this recent unacceptable behaviour and crime.

Local Government calls on Federal parties.

Dungog Council has backed the need for a Local Community Infrastructure Renewals Fund and called on local MPs, Senators and candidates to take the message to Canberra in the lead-up to the election campaign.

Dungog Shire has a number of community facilities requiring urgent attention, such as the Showground, Swimming pools, playgrounds, ovals, and other Community Infrastructure. Most of these facilities were built in the 1950s and 1960s or earlier and have reached their use-by date or require upgrading.

Councils around Australia face an infrastructure backlog of \$14.5 billion and the establishment of a Local Community Infrastructure Renewals Fund would allow councils to meet local priorities and would allow other upgrading work to be brought forward.

"We call on the Federal Government and the Opposition to commit to a 4-year \$250 million per annum fund to support key facilities in our community."

Copies of the Australian Local Government Association's election document – 'A 10-Point Plan to Reinvigorate Local Communities' – is available on the ALGA website, www.alga.asn.au
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