

Media Release

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Financially responsible Budget caters for diverse needs across Western Downs

Western Downs Regional Council has handed down a fiscally responsible Budget that caters to the diverse needs of its large region.

The Budget expects to deliver \$1.5 million in surplus, with a slight increase in rates and utility charges being kept to 1.5%, which is below the predicted inflation rate which the Reserve Bank estimates will likely sit at 2.25%.

This Budget provides for \$143 million in operating revenue, with \$141.5 million in expenditure and a conservative surplus aimed at continuing the financial responsibility this Council has exhibited in its two previous Budgets this term.

Western Downs Regional Council Mayor Paul McVeigh said he was pleased to hand down a Budget that did not forget the smaller towns, community groups and community initiatives, while still giving due focus to strategic priorities such as investment attraction, tourism development and industry growth.

"In a region the size of Switzerland with a diverse population managing many competing priorities is a real challenge and I believe this Budget does that in a fair and practical way," he said.

"This Council is committed to progress and innovation while supporting all our communities."

The 2018/19 Budget continues a strong focus on debt reduction, with Council's current debt at just \$5.5 million, which has been reduced from a debt of \$62 million in 2015.

Mayor McVeigh said fiscal responsibility was a hallmark of this Council, and that's reflected in this year's Budget.

"Being a financially responsible Council means we are making our money work smarter not harder, and this lets us allocate funds to the things that matter for the strength and vitality of our communities," he said.

"While this Budget and our forecasts over the next nine years indicate Council will be financially and operationally sustainable, we are looking way ahead in the future to ensure the sustainability of our region and that requires sensible financial planning now."

The Budget also holds good news for ratepayers, with a small increase of 1.5%.

This year includes a significant spend of \$35.6 million of the \$47.9 million capital expenditure program allocated to the region's 7,500 kilometres of road networks; a further \$3 million to deliver the Chinchilla Botanic Parklands; a focus on a sustainable water supply for the Western Downs with \$600,000 for a new bore in Bell and \$1 million for an additional bore in Dalby.

Parks and gardens will also benefit with a \$4.7 million allocation that includes the Tara Lions Park upgrade and Master Plan of the Tara Lagoon project, as well as \$50,000 towards a playground replacement for Morgan Place in Miles.

Roads, bridges and footpaths across the region will receive \$49.5 million with works scheduled across all six districts of the Western Downs, as well as a further \$11.3 million for resheeting and resealing the current road network.

The significant landscaping works to complement the Warrego Highway Upgrade through Dalby will also commence in 2018/19 with Council receiving \$1.5 million in funding from the Department of Transport and Main Roads to undertake the project.

Mayor McVeigh said this year's Budget has been about listening to the needs of the community and delivering value-for-money services and key programs that add to the quality of life of residents.

"Adding to the vibrancy of our communities and making them great places that our residents enjoy living and working in is a key focus of this Council," he said.

"It's the people who live and breath their local communities who have made a big impact on this Budget and this financial year we've taken projects and programs that our communities have enjoyed or called for and brought them to the fore.

"Upgrading our much-loved community halls, continuing the great work of our libraries, community grants and funding and enhancing our sports and recreational facilities across the region are only a few areas where we're adding to the great liveability of the Western Downs."

These projects include a further \$1 million towards the Dalby Knowles Pavilion upgrade to deliver a facility capable of holding large-scale events for the region, \$174,000 towards restumping the Jandowae and North Cooranga Halls and \$73,000 to repaint the Chinchilla Cultural Centre Auditorium.

Contributing to creating vibrant and welcoming communities Council has also committed \$40,000 towards the enhancement of town entry signage and landscaping for Miles.

Civic centres and community halls will receive a further \$1.2 million to continue their important role in the unity and social fabric of Western Downs communities, and the region's libraries have been budgeted \$2.2 million to continue their excellent delivery of services and programs.

Local events and community organisations will also be supported thanks to \$245,000 allocated for grants and donations, as well as concessions on rates and utilities for nearly 200 community organisations.

Sport and recreation across the region has been given a boost with \$300,000 allocated to a new Chinchilla Skatepark as campaigned for by the community, and \$514, 000 going towards building three multi-purpose courts which will not only give the Chinchilla Netball Association a permanent home but can be used by other sporting codes to maximise value of the facility.

The region's swimming pools will also receive upgrades through the 2018/19 capital works program with Council setting aside \$185,000 towards upgrades at the Dalby and Miles Swimming Pools.

Boosting tourism in the region Council has committed \$600,000 for a new outlook at the Bunya Mountains as well as dedicating \$250,000 to attracting tourists to the region through major events and sponsorship of industry conferences and forums and a further \$986,000 for continued excellent service of Visitor Information Centres and expanded Wi-Fi capability.

And in a Budget that has kept a strong focus on future sustainability and growth of the Western Downs region \$121,000 will be allocated to fostering business development and attraction within the region through sponsorship of business groups to assist their economic development efforts.

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