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Golden Plains Shire Council
Revenue and Rating Plan
2021-22 to 2024-25

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1. PURPOSE

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires each council to prepare a Revenue and Rating Plan to cover a minimum period of four years following each Council election. The Revenue and Rating Plan establishes the revenue raising framework within which the Council proposes to work.

The purpose of the Revenue and Rating Plan is to determine the most appropriate and affordable revenue and rating approach for Golden Plains Shire Council which in conjunction with other income sources will adequately finance the objectives in the council plan.

This plan is an important part of Council's integrated planning framework, all of which is created to help Council achieve its vision of *'a healthy, safe, vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community supported by strong leadership, transparent governance and community partnerships – Our Community, Our Economy, and Our Pride.*

Strategies outlined in this plan also need to align with the objectives contained in the Council Plan and will feed into our budgeting and long-term financial planning documents, as well as other strategic planning documents under our Council's strategic planning framework.



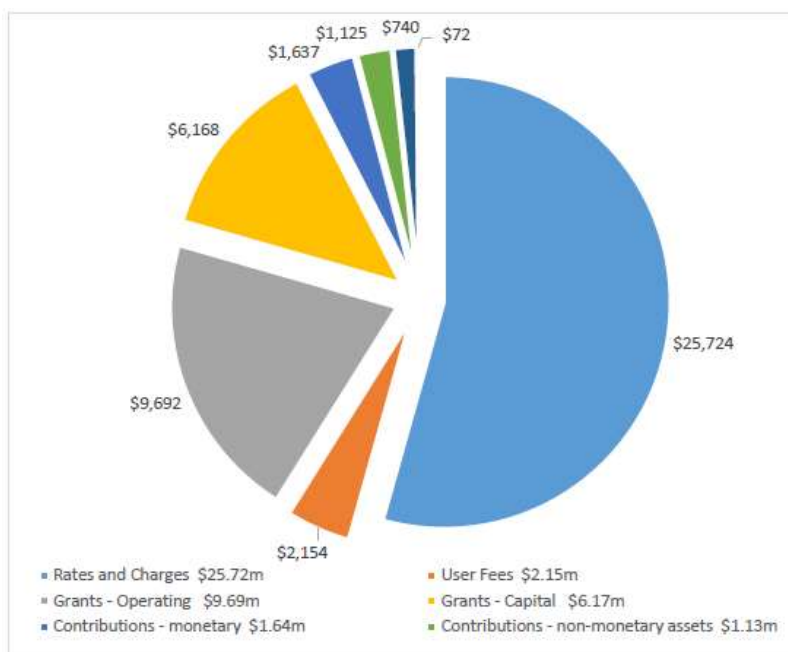
This plan will explain how Council calculates the revenue needed to fund its activities, and how the funding burden will be apportioned between ratepayers and other users of Council facilities and services.

In particular, this plan will set out decisions that Council has made in relation to rating options available to it under the *Local Government Act 2020* to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of rates across property owners. It will also set out principles that are used in decision making for other revenue sources such as fees and charges.

It is also important to note that this plan does not set revenue targets for Council, it outlines the strategic framework and decisions that inform how Council will go about calculating and collecting its revenue. To ensure financial sustainability revenue targets will be set as part of Council's 10 Year Financial Plan and annual budget process.

2. INTRODUCTION

Council provides a number of services and facilities to our local community, and in doing so, must collect revenue to cover the cost of providing these services and facilities. The following chart represents the revenue sources as proposed in the 2021/22 draft budget.



Council's revenue sources include:

- Rates and Charges
- Annual Service (Waste Management) Charge
- Grants from other levels of Government
- Statutory Fees and Fines
- User Fees
- Cash and non-cash contributions from other parties (i.e. developers, community groups)
- Interest from investments
- Sale of Assets

Rates are the most significant revenue source for Council and make up roughly 50%-55% of its annual income.

The introduction of rate capping under the Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates System (FGRS) has brought a renewed focus to Council's long-term financial sustainability. The FGRS continues to restrict Council's ability to raise revenue above the rate cap unless application is made to the Essential Services Commission for a variation. Maintaining service delivery levels and investing in community assets remain key priorities for Council.

Council provides a wide range of services to the community, often for a fee or charge. The nature of these fees and charges generally depends on whether they relate to statutory or discretionary services. Some of these, such as statutory planning fees are set by State Government statute and are commonly known as regulatory fees. In these cases, councils usually have no control over service pricing. However, in relation to other services, Council can set a fee or charge and will set that fee based on the principles outlined in this Revenue and Rating Plan.

Council revenue can also be adversely affected by changes to funding from other levels of government. Some grants are tied to the delivery of council services, whilst many are tied directly to the delivery of new community assets, such as roads or sports pavilions. It is important for Council to be clear about what grants it intends to apply for, and the obligations that grants create in the delivery of services or infrastructure.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Revenue and Rating Plan outlines Council's decision-making process on how revenues are calculated and collected. The following public consultation process will be followed to ensure due consideration and feedback is received from relevant stakeholders.

Revenue and Rating Plan community engagement process:

- Councillor Briefing Sessions held to discuss the annual budget process, including items relating to revenue and rating;
- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan prepared by officers and endorsed by Council;
- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan placed on public exhibition following the 27 April 2021 Council meeting for a period of no less than 28 days and inviting public submissions;
- Community engagement through local news outlets and social media;
- Hearing of public submissions at Council meeting held on 8 June 2021; and
- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan (with any revisions) presented to 22 June 2021 Council meeting for adoption.

Following community engagement, Council's Revenue and Rating Plan will be updated after consideration of any submissions.

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4. RATES AND CHARGES

Council collects rates from residents and businesses in its municipality to help fund the local community infrastructure and service obligations. Council rates are a form of property tax and Council uses property values as the basis for calculating how much each property owner pays. Importantly, rates are a taxation system that includes flexibility for councils to utilise different tools in its rating structure to accommodate issues of equity and to ensure fairness in rating for all ratepayers.

Council has established a rating structure comprised of three key elements. These are:

- **General Rates** – Based on property values (using the Capital Improved Valuation methodology), which are indicative of capacity to pay and form the central basis of rating under the *Local Government Act 1989*;
- **Waste Service Charges** - A 'user pays' component for council services to reflect benefits provided by Council to ratepayers who benefit from the collection, disposal and processing of garbage and recycling waste; and
- **Municipal Charge** - A 'fixed rate' portion per property to cover some of the administrative costs of Council.

Striking a proper balance between these elements will help to improve equity in the distribution of the rate burden across residents.

Council makes two further distinctions when applying general rates by applying rating differentials based on the purpose for which the property is used and its locality. That is:

- whether the property is used for residential, business industrial or commercial, farm broadacre, farm intensive, farm < 40 hectares, non-farm vacant land, or developable vacant land purposes; and
- in the case of business industrial or commercial, whether the property is located in the major urban area of Bannockburn.

This distinction is based on the concept that different property categories should pay a fair and equitable contribution, taking into account the benefits those properties derive from the local community.

The Golden Plains Shire Council rating structure comprises eight differential rates. These rates are structured in accordance with the requirements of Section 161 'Differential Rates' of the Local Government Act 1989, and the Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013.

The differential rates are currently set for 2021-22 as follows:

- | | |
|---|------|
| • Residential | 100% |
| • Business, Industrial & Commercial | 100% |
| • Business, Industrial & Commercial Bannockburn | 120% |
| • Farm Broadacre | 85% |
| • Farm Intensive | 90% |
| • Farm < 40 Hectares | 100% |
| • Non Farm Vacant Land | 200% |
| • Non Developable Vacant Land | 100% |

Council also levies a municipal charge. The municipal charge is a minimum rate per property and declared for the purpose of covering some of the administrative costs of Council. In applying the municipal charge, Council ensures that each ratable property in the municipality makes a contribution.

The formula for calculating General Rates, excluding any additional charges, arrears or additional supplementary rates is:

- **Valuation (Capital Improved Value) x Rate in the Dollar (Differential Rate Type)**

The rate in the dollar for each rating differential category is included in Council's annual budget.

Rates and charges are an important source of revenue, accounting for over 50% of operating revenue received by Council. The collection of rates is an important factor in funding Council services. Planning for future rate increases is therefore an essential component of the long-term financial planning process and plays a significant role in funding both additional service delivery and the increasing costs related to providing Council services.

Council is aware of the balance between rate revenue (as an important income source) and community sensitivity to rate increases. With the introduction of the State Government's Fair Go Rates System, all rate increases are capped to a rate declared by the Minister for Local Government, which is announced in December for the following financial year.

Council currently utilises an annual service charge to fully recover the cost of Council's waste services. The annual service charge is not capped under the Fair Go Rates System, and Council will continue to allocate funds generated from this charge towards the provision of managing waste.

4.1. Rating Legislation

The legislative framework set out in the *Local Government Act 1989* determines council's ability to develop a rating system. The framework provides significant flexibility for Council to tailor a system that suits its needs.

Section 155 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may declare the following rates and charges on rateable land:

- General rates under Section 158
- Municipal charges under Section 159
- Service rates and charges under Section 162
- Special rates and charges under Section 163

In raising Council rates, Council is required to primarily use the valuation of the rateable property to levy rates. Section 157 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides Council with three choices in terms of which valuation base to utilise. They are: Site Valuation, Capital Improved Valuation (CIV) and Net Annual Value (NAV).

These are defined in the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* as follows:

Site value of land means the sum which the land, if it were held for an estate in fee simple unencumbered by any lease, mortgage or other charge, might in ordinary circumstances be expected to realise at the time of the valuation if offered for sale on such reasonable terms and conditions as a genuine seller might be expected to require, and assuming that the improvements (if any) had not been made.

Capital improved value means the sum which land, if it were held for an estate in fee simple unencumbered by any lease, mortgage or other charge, might be expected to realise at the time of valuation if offered for sale on any reasonable terms and conditions which a genuine seller might in ordinary circumstances be expected to require.

Net annual value of any land means:

(a) except in the case of the lands described in paragraphs (b) and (c):

- i. the estimated annual value of the land; or
- ii. five per centum of the capital improved value of the land (whichever is the greater); or

(b) In the case of any rateable land which is:

- i. farm land; or
- ii. a house, flat or unit (other than an apartment house, lodging house or boarding house) in the exclusive occupation of the owner and used for residential purposes; or
- iii. a house or unit (other than an apartment house, lodging house or boarding house) in the exclusive occupation of a tenant and used for residential purposes; or
- iv. a residential unit in respect of which a residence right in a retirement village (as defined in the *Retirement Villages Act 1986*) exists;

five per centum of the capital improved value of the land; or

- (c) in the case of parklands, reserves or other lands owned by the Crown or any statutory authority, occupied (other than under any lease) for pastoral purposes only, the estimated annual value of it.

The advantages and disadvantages of the respective valuation basis are discussed further in this document. Whilst this document outlines Council's strategy regarding rates revenue, rates data will be contained in the Council's Annual Budget as required by the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Section 94(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that Council must adopt a budget by 30 June each year (or at another time fixed by the Minister) to include:

- a) the total amount that the Council intends to raise by rates and charges;
- b) a statement as to whether the rates will be raised by the application of a uniform rate or a differential rate;
- c) a description of any fixed component of the rates, if applicable;
- d) if the Council proposes to declare a uniform rate, the matters specified in section 160 of the *Local Government Act 1989*;
- e) if the Council proposes to declare a differential rate for any land, the matters specified in section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*;

Section 94(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020* also states that Council must ensure that, if applicable, the budget also contains a statement –

- a) that the Council intends to apply for a special order to increase the Council's average rate cap for the financial year or any other financial year; or
- b) that the Council has made an application to the ESC for a special order and is waiting for the outcome of the application; or
- c) that a special Order has been made in respect of the Council and specifying the average rate cap that applies for the financial year or any other financial year.

This plan outlines the principles and strategic framework that Council will utilise in calculating and distributing the rating burden to property owners, however, the quantum of rate revenue and rating differential amounts will be determined in the annual Golden Plains Shire Council budget.

In 2019 the Victorian State Government conducted a Local Government Rating System Review. The Local Government Rating System Review Panel presented their final report and list of recommendations to the Victorian Government in March 2020. The Victorian Government subsequently published a response to the recommendations of the Panel's report. However, at the time of publication the recommended changes have not yet been implemented, and timelines to make these changes have not been announced.

4.2. Rating Principles

Taxation Principles:

When developing a rating strategy, in particular with reference to differential rates, a Council should give consideration to the following good practice taxation principles:

- Wealth Tax
- Equity
- Efficiency
- Simplicity
- Benefit
- Capacity to Pay
- Diversity.

Wealth Tax

The "wealth tax" principle implies that the rates paid are dependent upon the value of a ratepayer's real property and have no correlation to the individual ratepayer's consumption of services or the perceived benefits derived by individual ratepayers from the expenditures funded from rates.

Equity

Horizontal equity – ratepayers in similar situations should pay similar amounts of rates (ensured mainly by accurate property valuations, undertaken in a consistent manner, their classification into homogenous property classes and the right of appeal against valuation).

Vertical equity – those who are better off should pay more rates than those worse off (the rationale applies for the use of progressive and proportional income taxation. It implies a “relativity” dimension to the fairness of the tax burden).

Efficiency

Economic efficiency is measured by the extent to which production and consumption decisions by people are affected by rates.

Simplicity

How easily a rates system can be understood by ratepayers and the practicality and ease of administration.

Benefit

The extent to which there is a nexus between consumption/benefit and the rate burden.

Capacity to Pay

The capacity of ratepayers or groups of ratepayers to pay rates.

Diversity

The capacity of ratepayers within a group to pay rates.

The rating challenge for Council therefore is to determine the appropriate balancing of competing considerations.

Rates and Charges Revenue Principles:

Property rates will:

- be reviewed annually;
- not change dramatically from one year to next; and
- be sufficient to fund current expenditure commitments and deliverables outlined in the Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

Differential rating should be applied as equitably as is practical and will comply with the [Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013](#).

4.3. Valuation Base

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council has three options as to the valuation base it elects to use. They are:

- **Capital Improved Value (CIV)** – Value of land and improvements upon the land.
- **Site Value (SV)** – Value of land only.
- **Net Annual Value (NAV)** – Rental valuation based on CIV.

For residential and farm properties, NAV is calculated at 5 per cent of the Capital Improved Value. For commercial and industrial properties, NAV is calculated as the greater of the estimated annual rental value or 5 per cent of the CIV.

Capital Improved Value (CIV)

Capital Improved Value is the most commonly used valuation base by local government with over 90% of Victorian councils applying this methodology. Based on the value of both land and all improvements on the land, it is generally easily understood by ratepayers as it equates to the market value of the property.

Section 161 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate if –

- a) It uses the capital improved value system of valuing land; and
- b) It considers that a differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.

Where a council does not utilise CIV, it may only apply limited differential rates in relation to farm land, urban farm land or residential use land.

Advantages of using Capital Improved Value (CIV)

- CIV includes all property improvements, and hence is often supported on the basis that it more closely reflects “capacity to pay”. The CIV rating method takes into account the full development value of the property, and hence better meets the equity criteria than Site Value and NAV.
- With the increased frequency of valuations (previously two year intervals, now annual intervals) the market values are more predictable and has reduced the level of objections resulting from valuations.
- The concept of the market value of property is more easily understood with CIV rather than NAV or SV.
- Most councils in Victoria have now adopted CIV which makes it easier to compare relative movements in rates and valuations across councils.
- The use of CIV allows council to apply differential rates which greatly adds to council’s ability to equitably distribute the rating burden based on ability to afford council rates. CIV allows council to apply higher rating differentials to the commercial and industrial sector that offset residential rates.

Disadvantages of using CIV

- The main disadvantage with CIV is the fact that rates are based on the total property value which may not necessarily reflect the income level of the property owner as with pensioners and low-income earners.

Site value (SV)

There are currently no Victorian councils that use this valuation base. With valuations based simply on the valuation of land and with only very limited ability to apply differential rates, the implementation of Site Value in a Golden Plains Shire Council context would cause a shift in rate burden from the industrial/commercial sectors onto the residential sector, and would hinder council’s objective of a fair and equitable rating system.

There would be further rating movements away from modern townhouse style developments on relatively small land parcels to older established homes on quarter acre residential blocks. In many ways, it is difficult to see an equity argument being served by the implementation of site valuation in the Golden Plains Shire Council.

Advantages of Site Value

- There is a perception that under site value, a uniform rate would promote development of land, particularly commercial and industrial developments. There is, however, little evidence to prove that this is the case.
- Scope for possible concessions for urban farm-land and residential use land.

Disadvantages of using Site Value

- Under SV, there will be a significant shift from the industrial/commercial sector onto the residential sector of council. The percentage increases in many cases would be in the extreme range.
- SV is a major burden on property owners that have large areas of land. Some of these owners may have much smaller/older dwellings compared to those who have smaller land areas but well developed dwellings - but will pay more in rates. A typical example is flats, units, or townhouses which will all pay low rates compared to traditional housing styles.
- The use of SV can place pressure on council to give concessions to categories of landowners on whom the rating burden is seen to fall disproportionately (e.g. Farm land and residential use properties). Large landowners, such as farmers for example, are disadvantaged by the use of site value.
- SV will reduce Council's rating flexibility and options to deal with any rating inequities due to the removal of the ability to levy differential rates.
- The community may have greater difficulty in understanding the SV valuation on their rate notices, as indicated by many inquiries from ratepayers on this issue handled by council's customer service and property revenue staff each year.

Net annual value (NAV)

NAV, in concept, represents the annual rental value of a property. However, in practice, NAV is loosely linked to capital improved value for residential and farm properties. Valuers derive the NAV directly as 5 per cent of CIV.

In contrast to the treatment of residential and farm properties, NAV for commercial and industrial properties are assessed with regard to actual market rental. This differing treatment of commercial versus residential and farm properties has led to some suggestions that all properties should be valued on a rental basis.

Overall, the use of NAV is not largely supported. For residential and farm ratepayers, actual rental values pose some problems. The artificial rental estimate used may not represent actual market value, and means the base is the same as CIV but is harder to understand.

Recommended valuation base

In choosing a valuation base, councils must decide on whether they wish to adopt a differential rating system (different rates in the dollar for different property categories) or a uniform rating system (same rate in the dollar). If a council was to choose the former, under the *Local Government Act 1989* it must adopt either of the CIV or NAV methods of rating.

Golden Plains Shire Council applies Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the fully developed value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land plus buildings and other improvements.

Differential rating allows (under the CIV method) council to shift part of the rate burden from some groups of ratepayers to others, through different "rates in the dollar" for each class of property.

Section 161(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* outlines the requirements relating to differential rates, which include:

- a) A Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate, if Council considers that the differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.
- b) If a Council declares a differential rate for any land, the Council must specify the objectives of the differential rate, which must be consistent with the equitable and efficient carrying out of the Councils functions and must include the following:
 - i. A definition of the types or classes of land which are subject to the rate and a statement of the reasons for the use and level of that rate.

- ii. An identification of the type or classes of land which are subject to the rate in respect of the uses, geographic location (other than location on the basis of whether or not the land is within a specific ward in Council's district).
- iii. Specify the characteristics of the land, which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

Once the Council has declared a differential rate for any land, the Council must:

- a) Specify the objectives of the differential rates;
- b) Specify the characteristics of the land which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

The purpose is to ensure that Council has a sound basis on which to develop the various charging features when determining its revenue strategies and ensure that these are consistent with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

The general objectives of each of the differential rates are to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. There is no limit on the number or types of differential rates that can be levied, but the highest differential rate can be no more than four times the lowest differential rate.

Property Valuations

The *Valuation of Land Act 1960* is the principle legislation in determining property valuations. Under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*, the Victorian Valuer-General conducts property valuations on an annual basis. Golden Plains Shire Council applies a Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the full development value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land including buildings and other improvements.

The value of land is always derived by the principal of valuing land for its highest and best use at the relevant time of valuation.

Council needs to be mindful of the impacts of revaluations on the various property types in implementing the differential rating strategy outlined in the previous section to ensure that rises and falls in council rates remain affordable and that rating 'shocks' are mitigated to some degree.

Supplementary Valuations

Supplementary valuations are carried out for a variety of reasons including rezoning, subdivisions, amalgamations, renovations, new constructions, extensions, occupancy changes and corrections. The Victorian Valuer-General is tasked with undertaking supplementary valuations and advises council on a monthly basis of valuation and Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) changes.

Supplementary valuations bring the value of the affected property into line with the general valuation of other properties within the municipality. Objections to supplementary valuations can be lodged in accordance with Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*. Any objections must be lodged with Council within two months of the issue of the supplementary rate notice.

Objections to property valuations

Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* provides that a property owner may lodge an objection against the valuation of a property or the Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) within two months of the issue of the original or amended (supplementary) Rates and Valuation Charges Notice (Rates Notice), or within four months if the notice was not originally issued to the occupier of the land.

A property owner must lodge their objection to the valuation or the AVPCC in writing to the Golden Plains Shire Council. Property owners also have the ability to object to the site valuations on receipt of their Land Tax Assessment. Property owners can appeal their land valuation within two months of receipt of their Council Rate Notice (via Council) or within two months of receipt of their Land Tax Assessment (via the State Revenue Office).

4.4. Rating Differentials

Objectives of Differential Rating

Under section 161 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council can levy either a uniform rate or one or more differential rates. A uniform rate is where all rateable properties in a municipality are charged based on the same rate in the dollar. Differential rates are where councils set different rates in the dollar for different categories of rateable land. Council believes that each differential rate set out below will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of council functions.

Section 3A (1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* provided that the primary objective of a municipal Council is to 'endeavor to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions'. In seeking to achieve its primary objective, a council must have regard to the number of facilitating objectives including the objective that was in section 3C (2) (f) of the Act to 'ensure the equitable imposition of rates and charges'.

Pursuant to section 161 of the Act a Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate if it uses the Capital Improved Value system of valuing land. When declaring general rates, a Council must consider how the use of differential rating contributes to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions compared to the use of the uniform rates. Such a determination and its rationale should be disclosed in the Council's proposed budget and any revised budget or referenced in the Council's Revenue and Rating Plan.

Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating

The Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating were published in the Government Gazette in April 2013. The guidelines were prepared to guide councils in the application of differential rates under section 161 of the Act. Councils must have regard to these guidelines before declaring a differential rate for any land.

The Minister may recommend, the Government in Council by Order in Council to prohibit any council from making a declaration of a differential rate in respect of a type or class of land, if the Minister considers that the declaration would be inconsistent with any guidelines.

Council's Rating System

Golden Plains Shire Council adopted the Capital Improved Valuation (CIV) system for rating purposes. CIV represents the market value of a property as at a specific date, including the value of the land and any improvements on that land. Utilising CIV as the basis for rates allows the Council to adopt differential rating, which better reflects capacity to pay than the alternatives and provides the Council with the flexibility to levy differential rates. The vast majority of Victorian Councils use CIV as the basis for levying rates and charges.

One of the challenges of our legislated rating system is high population growth. Properties in growth townships with increasing property values will continue to pay much higher rate increases than properties in other areas of Golden Plains. This means properties in growth townships typically experience rate increases much higher than the average rate cap. As a result, other areas of Golden Plains experience rate decreases. In an effort to make this system fairer in 2019-20 Council decreased total rate revenue (which is distributed using property values) and increased the revenue raised from the fixed municipal charge. This approach will ensure that all ratepayers contribute a higher minimum amount and less revenue will be contributed from a property valuation based rating system.

The existing rating structure is comprised eight differential rates.

Residential

Definition:

Any land, whether vacant or built upon that is not zoned for commercial or industrial use and which does not have the characteristics of:

- a) Business, Industrial or Commercial Land;
- b) Farm Land Broadacre;
- c) Farm Land Intensive;
- d) Farm Land < 40 Hectares;
- e) Non Farm Vacant Land; or
- f) Developable Vacant Land

and whose highest and best use is deemed to be as residential land.

Objectives:

To encourage commerce and industry, and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

- a) used primarily for residential purposes,
- b) highest and best use is deemed to be as residential,
- c) any land that is not defined as Business, Industrial, Commercial, Farm Land or Vacant Land.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of the base rate. This rating category is deemed to be the "base rate" due to it containing the majority of assessments.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme to be used for residential purposes.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Business, Industrial and Commercial

Definition:

Any land, whether vacant or built upon that is not zoned for residential or farming use and which does not have the characteristics of:

- a) Residential Land;
- b) Farm Land Broadacre;
- c) Farm Land Intensive;
- d) Farm Land < 40 Hectares;
- e) Non Farm Vacant Land; or
- f) Developable Vacant Land.

Objectives:

To encourage commerce and industry, and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

- a) used primarily for business, industrial or commercial purposes,
- b) any land that is not defined as Residential, Farm Land or Vacant Land.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of the base rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme to be used for business, industrial or commercial purposes.

Geographic Location:

In the localities of the shire.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Business, Industrial and Commercial - Bannockburn

Definition:

Any land, whether vacant or built upon that is not zoned for residential or farming use and which does not have the characteristics of:

- g) Residential Land;
- h) Farm Land Broadacre;
- i) Farm Land Intensive;
- j) Farm Land < 40 Hectares;
- k) Non Farm Vacant Land; or
- l) Developable Vacant Land.

Objectives:

To enable more resources to be devoted to strategic planning of Business, Industrial and Commercial (Growth Area) (including planning for the infrastructure and community needs of those operating businesses on Business, Industrial and Commercial (Growth Area)), to encourage commerce and industry and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

- c) used primarily for business, industrial or commercial purposes,
- d) any land that is not defined as Residential, Farm Land or Vacant Land.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

120% of the base rate. The rationale for this category to be rated at a rate above the base rate is that:

- businesses located in Bannockburn are in a growth area and benefit from the services and facilities provided in this major township;
- services and facilities provided by the shire help to attract residents to the shire, which can provide businesses with both a source of labor and customers; and
- businesses generally have a capacity pay, which is complimented by rates being a tax deductible expense.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme to be used for business, industrial or commercial purposes.

Geographic Location:

In the localities of the shire in the Bannockburn township.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Farm Land Broadacre

Definition:

Any land located within the shire which is “Farm Land Broadacre” within the meaning of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and is zoned to allow land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes.

Any land which is “Farm Land Broadacre” within the meaning of Section 2(1) of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*.

- a) Farm Land means any rateable land that is between 2 and 40 hectares in area;
- b) used primarily for primary producing purposes from its activities on the land; used primarily for grazing (including agistment) or the growing of crops; and

That is used by a business –

- That has a significant and substantial commercial purpose of character;
- That seeks to make a profit on a continuous or repetitive basis from its activities on the land; and
- That is making a profit from its activities on the land, or that has a reasonable prospect of making a profit from its activities on the land if it continues to operate in the way that it is operating.

Typically, these properties may contain buildings used as a residence and for farm purposes and will also contain land with no buildings located upon it.

In addition, it may include small parcels of undeveloped land that do not meet the meaning of “Farm Land” prescribed in of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960, but are also deemed unlikely to be granted a town planning permit for a dwelling to be located on the property.

Typically these properties will be:

- a) between 2 and 40 hectares in area;
- b) be zoned to allow the land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes;
- c) been deemed unviable for the purposes of carrying on a business of primary production by Council; and
- d) been deemed unsuitable to allow the construction of a dwelling.

Objectives:

To enable more resources to be devoted to strategic planning of Farm Land (including planning for the infrastructure and community needs of those operating farms or residing on Farm Land, to encourage farming activity and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

- a) used primarily for large scale production farming purposes,
- b) any land that is not defined as Residential, Business, Commercial or Industrial, Farm Land Intensive, Farm Land < 40 Hectares or Vacant Land

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

85% of the base rate. The justification for this category to be rated at a lesser rate than the base rate is that properties in this category are:

- generally in smaller townships or rural areas;
- have less access to the full suite of services and amenities provided by Council; and
- due to small populations are generally less likely to attract expenditure by Council.

A lesser rate in the dollar is therefore considered to be fair and equitable.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme to be used for broadacre farming purposes.

Geographic Location:

In all the localities of the Golden Plains Shire.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Farm Land Intensive

Definition:

Any land located within the shire which is “Farm Land Intensive” within the meaning of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and is zoned to allow land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes.

Any land which is “Farm Land Intensive” within the meaning of Section 2(1) of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*.

- c) Farm Land means any rateable land that is over 2 hectares in area;
- d) used primarily for primary producing purposes from its activities on the land; used primarily for small farming such as poultry farming, olive growing; and

That is used by a business –

- That has a significant and substantial commercial purpose of character;
- That seeks to make a profit on a continuous or repetitive basis from its activities on the land; and
- That is making a profit from its activities on the land, or that has a reasonable prospect of making a profit from its activities on the land if it continues to operate in the way that it is operating.

Typically, these properties may contain buildings used as a residence and for farm purposes and will also contain land with no buildings located upon it.

In addition, it may include small parcels of undeveloped land that do not meet the meaning of “Farm Land” prescribed in of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960, but are also deemed unlikely to be granted a town planning permit for a dwelling to be located on the property.

Typically these properties will be:

- a) over 2 hectares in area;
- b) be zoned to allow the land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes;
- c) been deemed unviable for the purposes of carrying on a business of primary production by Council; and
- d) been deemed unsuitable to allow the construction of a dwelling.

Objectives:

To enable more resources to be devoted to strategic planning of Farm Land (including planning for the infrastructure and community needs of those operating farms or residing on Farm Land, to encourage farming activity and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

- c) used primarily for large scale production farming purposes,
- d) any land that is not defined as Residential, Business, Commercial or Industrial, Farm Land Broadacre, Farm Land < 40 Hectares or Vacant Land

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

90% of the base rate. The justification for this category to be rated at a lesser rate than the base rate is that properties in this category are:

- generally in smaller townships or rural areas;
- have less access to the full suite of services and amenities provided by Council; and
- due to small populations are generally less likely to attract expenditure by Council.

A rate less than the base rate in the dollar is therefore considered to be fair and equitable.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme to be used for intensive farming purposes.

Geographic Location:

In all the localities of the Golden Plains Shire.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Farm Land < 40 Hectares

Definition:

Any land located within the shire which is "Farm Land < 40 Hectares" within the meaning of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and is zoned to allow land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes.

Any land which is "Farm Land < 40 Hectares" within the meaning of Section 2(1) of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*.

- e) Farm Land means any rateable land that is less than 40 hectares in area;
- f) used primarily for primary producing purposes from its activities on the land; used primarily for dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing or the growing of crops of any kind or for any combination of those activities; and

That is used by a business –

- That has a significant and substantial commercial purpose of character;
- That seeks to make a profit on a continuous or repetitive basis from its activities on the land; and
- That is making a profit from its activities on the land, or that has a reasonable prospect of making a profit from its activities on the land if it continues to operate in the way that it is operating.

Typically, these properties may contain buildings used as a residence and for farm purposes and will also contain land with no buildings located upon it.

In addition, it may include small parcels of undeveloped land that do not meet the meaning of "Farm Land" prescribed in of section 2 of the Valuation of Land Act 1960, but are also deemed unlikely to be granted a town planning permit for a dwelling to be located on the property.

Typically these properties will be:

- a) less than 40 hectares in area;
- b) be zoned to allow the land to be used for rural and/or farming purposes;
- c) been deemed unviable for the purposes of carrying on a business of primary production by Council; and
- d) been deemed unsuitable to allow the construction of a dwelling.

Objectives:

To encourage farming activity and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Farm Land having the relevant characteristics described above that is:

- a) used primarily for primary production purposes; or
- b) any land that is not defined as Residential, Business, Commercial or Industrial, Farm Land Broadacre, Farm Land Intensive or Vacant Land.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of the base rate. The justification for this category to be rated at a lesser rate than the base rate is that properties in this category are:

- have less access to the full suite of services and amenities provided by Council;
- due to the land area required to operate, these properties have higher valuations (and therefore higher rates) than residential properties; and

It is therefore deemed fair and equitable that properties in this category pay rates at the same rate in the dollar than the base rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

In all the localities of the Golden Plains Shire that contain land zoned in the Golden Plains Planning Scheme as Farm Land < 40 Hectares.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Non Farm Vacant Land

Definition:

Any land, whether vacant or built upon that is not zoned for residential or farming use and which does not have the characteristics of:

- a) Residential Land;
- b) Business, Commercial or Industrial;
- c) Farm Land Broadacre;
- d) Farm Land Intensive;
- e) Farm Land < 40 Hectares; or
- f) Non Developable Vacant Land.

Objectives:

To enable more resources to be devoted to strategic planning of Non Farm Vacant Land (including planning for the infrastructure and community needs of those who may come to occupy Non Farm Vacant Land), to encourage development of that land and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Vacant land that is possible to be developed.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

200% of the base rate. The rationale for this category to be rated at a rate above the base rate is that:

- to encourage developing land by either subdividing or building a dwelling on the land, to generate more residents in the shire which can stimulate businesses;
- services and facilities provided by the shire help to attract residents to the shire, which can provide businesses with both a source of labour and customers; and
- these customers generally have a capacity pay with the vacant land an investment property.

It is therefore deemed fair and equitable that properties in this category pay rates at a higher rate in the dollar than the base rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

In the localities of the Shire.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Shire Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Non Developable Vacant Land

Definition:

Any land, whether vacant or built upon that is not zoned for residential or farming use and which does not have the characteristics of:

- g) Residential Land;
- h) Business, Commercial or Industrial;
- i) Farm Land Broadacre;
- j) Farm Land Intensive;
- k) Farm Land < 40 Hectares; or
- l) Non Farm Vacant Land.

Objectives:

To enable more resources to be devoted to strategic planning of Non Developable Vacant Land (including planning for the infrastructure and community needs of those who may come to occupy Non Developable Vacant Land), and to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including the:

- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure
- Development and provision of health and community services and
- Provision of general support services

Types and Classes:

Vacant land that does not have the potential to be developed.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of the base rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Golden Plains Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

In the localities of the Shire.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Golden Plains Shire Council Shire Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Advantages of a differential rating system

The advantages of utilising a differential rating system summarised below are:

- There is greater flexibility to distribute the rate burden between all classes of property, and therefore link rates with the ability to pay and reflecting the tax deductibility of rates for commercial and industrial premises.
- Differential rating allows Council to better reflect the investment required by Council to establish infrastructure to meet the needs of the commercial and industrial sector.
- Allows Council to reflect the unique circumstances of some rating categories where the application of a uniform rate may create an inequitable outcome (e.g. Farming enterprises).
- Allows Council discretion in the imposition of rates to facilitate and encourage appropriate development of its municipal district in the best interest of the community. (i.e. Non Farm Vacant Land attract a higher differential rate).

Disadvantages of a differential rating system

The disadvantages in applying differential rating summarised below are:

- The justification of the differential rate can at times be difficult for the various groups to accept giving rise to queries and complaints where the differentials may seem to be excessive.
- Differential rates can be confusing to ratepayers, as they may have difficulty understanding the system. Some rating categories may feel they are unfavourably treated because they are paying rates at a higher level than other ratepayer groups.
- Differential rating involves a degree of administrative complexity as properties can shift from one rating category to another (e.g. Non Farm Vacant Land to Residential) requiring Council to update its records. Ensuring the accuracy/integrity of Council's data base is critical to ensure that properties are correctly classified into their right category.
- Council may not achieve the objectives it aims for through differential rating. For example, Council may set its differential rate objectives to levy a higher rate on land not developed, however it may be difficult to prove whether the rate achieves those objectives.

4.5. Municipal Charge

Another principle rating option available to Councils is the application of a Municipal Charge. Under Section 159 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may declare a municipal charge to cover some of the administrative costs of the Council. The legislation is not definitive on what comprises administrative costs and does not require Council to specify what is covered by the charge.

The application of a municipal charge represents a choice to raise a portion of the rates by a flat fee for all properties, rather than sole use of the CIV valuation method.

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, a council's total revenue from a municipal charge in a financial year must not exceed 20 per cent of the combined sum total of the Council's total revenue from the municipal charge and the revenue from general rates (total rates).

The municipal charge applies equally to all properties and is based upon the recovery of a fixed cost of providing administrative services irrespective of valuation. The same contribution amount per assessment to cover a portion of council's administrative costs can be seen as an equitable method of recovering these costs. Being a set charge, the Municipal Charge has a more pronounced effect on lower valued properties as it represents a greater proportion of the total rates bill for these properties that it does for higher valued properties.

Evidence suggests that lower valued properties are more likely to be owned by people with lower incomes, so the Municipal Charge can be viewed as penalising the poorer members of the community

4.6. Annual Service (Waste Management) Charge

An annual service charge for the domestic kerbside collection service is also levied. The aim of the charge is to apportion the total cost of managing the collection, transportation and disposal of domestic waste, to the owners of all properties that derive a benefit from having the service available for use.

The charge is therefore levied on all developed assessments used primarily for residential or commercial purposes that are located on the designated collection routes.

The charge is not levied on vacant land properties. Business/Industrial/Commercial properties may apply for an exemption from the charge if they produce non domestic types of waste and provide proof they have engaged a contractor to collect and dispose of their waste.

As such this charge is akin to a “user pays” charge rather than a tax.

The waste management charges set for 2021-22 are as follows:

Type of Charge	Per Rateable Property 2021-22 \$
Residential Garbage Inc Recycling	385
Second Service Garbage Collection	192.50
Second Service Recycling Collection	192.50
Commercial Garbage Inc Recycling (Cost Recovery)	385

4.7. Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL)

Rates notices also contain two charges that make up the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL). The FSPL is a State government levy that Council is required to collect for the State government and remit to the State government on a quarterly basis. Council derives no revenue from this action.

The State government used the revenue from the FSPL to fund the operation of the Country Fire Authority throughout Victoria.

There are two parts to the FSPL, namely:

- a Fixed charge
- a variable levy based on the Capital Improved Valuation of the property.

The State government sets the fixed charge and the rates in the dollar that apply to the variable component. Similar to Council's differential rating structure, the State government applies different fixed charges and rates in the dollar to different categories of properties.

More detailed information regarding the FSPL is available at: www.sro.vic.gov.au

4.8. Special Charge Schemes

The *Local Government Act 1989* recognises that councils need help to provide improved infrastructure for their local communities. Legislation allows councils to pass on the cost of capital infrastructure to the owner of a property that generally receives a unique benefit from the construction works. The technical explanation of a Special Charge comes from legislation (under the *Local Government Act 1989*) that allows councils to recover the cost of works from property owners who will gain special benefit from that work.

The purposes for which special rates and special charges may be used include road construction, kerb and channelling, footpath provision, drainage, and other capital improvement projects.

The special rate or special charges may be declared on the basis of any criteria specified by the council in the rate (Section 163 (2)). In accordance with Section 163 (3), council must specify:

- a. the wards, groups, uses or areas for which the special rate or charge is declared; and
- b. the land in relation to which the special rate or special charge is declared;
- c. the manner in which the special rate or special charge will be assessed and levied; and
- d. details of the period for which the special rate or special charge remains in force.

The special rates and charges provisions are flexible and can be used to achieve a wide range of community objectives. The fundamental principle of special rates and charges is proof “special benefit” applies to those being levied. For example, they could be used to fund co-operative fire prevention schemes. This would ensure that there were no ‘free-riders’ reaping the benefits but not contributing to fire prevention.

Landscaping and environmental improvement programs that benefit small or localised areas could also be funded using special rates or charges.

Golden Plains Shire Council utilise Special Charges on a case-by-case basis, except for the application of the Tirrengower Special (Drainage) Scheme.

4.9. Service Rates and Charges

Section 162 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides council with the opportunity to raise service rates and charges for any of the following services:

- a. The provision of a water supply;
- b. The collection and disposal of refuse;
- c. The provision of sewage services;
- d. Any other prescribed service.

As mentioned in 1.4.6, Council applies an Annual Service (Waste Management) Charge to fully recover the cost of managing the collection, transportation and disposal of domestic waste.

It is recommended that council retain the existing waste service charge – should council elect not to have a waste service charge, this same amount would be required to be raised by way of an increased general rate – meaning that residents in higher valued properties would substantially pay for the waste service of lower valued properties.

Whilst this same principle applies for rates in general, the mix of having a single fixed charge combined with valuation driven rates for the remainder of the rate notice provides a balanced and equitable outcome.

4.10. Collection and Administration of Rates and Charges

The purpose of this section is to outline the rate payment options, processes, and the support provided to ratepayers facing financial hardship.

Payment options

In accordance with section 167(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* ratepayers have the option of paying rates and charges by way of four instalments. Payments are due on the prescribed dates below:

- 1st Instalment: 30 September
- 2nd Instalment: 30 November
- 3rd Instalment: 28 February
- 4th Instalment: 31 May

Council offers a range of payment options including:

- in person at Council offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS, credit/debit cards and cash),
- online via Council's ratepayer portal, direct debit (on prescribed instalment due dates or monthly),
- BPAY,
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone via credit card and on the internet),
- Centrepay;
- Ten monthly payments;
- by mail (cheques and money orders only).

Interest on arrears and overdue rates

Interest is charged on all overdue rates in accordance with Section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The interest rate applied is fixed under Section 2 of the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*, which is determined by the Minister and published by notice in the Government Gazette.

Pensioner rebates

Holders of a Centrelink or Veteran Affairs Pension Concession card or a Veteran Affairs Gold card which stipulates TPI or War Widow may claim a rebate on their sole or principal place of residence. Upon initial application, ongoing eligibility is maintained, unless rejected by Centrelink or the Department of Veteran Affairs during the annual verification procedure. Upon confirmation of an eligible pensioner concession status, the pensioner rebate is deducted from the rate account before payment is required by the ratepayer.

With regards to new applicants, after being granted a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), pensioners can then apply for the rebate at any time throughout the rating year. Retrospective claims up to a maximum of one previous financial year can be approved by Council on verification of eligibility criteria, for periods prior to this claims may be approved by the relevant government department.

Financial Hardship Policy

It is acknowledged at the outset that various ratepayers may experience financial hardship for a whole range of issues and that meeting rate obligations constitutes just one element of a number of difficulties that may be faced. The purpose of the Rates debtors in Financial Hardship Policy is to provide assistance to ratepayers experiencing ongoing financial hardship.

The policy only applies to rates debts connected to the applicant's principal place of residence. It does not apply to investment properties or business properties.

The policy provides for Council to waive accrued interest and put a moratorium on future interest to allow the ratepayer to catch up with the debt. Waiving accrued interest immediately reduces the amount of the debt and not charging interest into the future allows payments made to be applied to paying off the debt rather than being applied towards paying interest in the first instance.

It is pointed out there is an expectation the debtor is trying to pay the debt and will use the assistance to catch up. Any assistance provided is effectively being provided by all other ratepayers.

Ratepayers seeking assistance under this policy required to submit an Application form and submit detailed personal information to verify they are legitimately in financial hardship, The application form which is available at the council offices, website or can be posted upon request. All applications are treated confidentially.

Debt recovery

Council makes every effort to contact ratepayers at their correct address but it is the ratepayers' responsibility to properly advise Council of their contact details. The *Local Government Act 1989* Section 230 and 231 requires both the vendor and buyer of property, or their agents (e.g. solicitors and or conveyancers), to notify Council by way of notice of disposition or acquisition of an interest in land.

Council issues a Final Notice in March for unpaid lump sum payment option accounts.

As Instalment payment option payers received quarterly instalment notices in November, February and May, a Final Notice for these is not required. Council does however send a letter in June/July to these ratepayers who have not paid in full. These ratepayers then receive the next annual notice in August, which shows any unpaid rates as arrears.

Council makes every effort to make ratepayers aware of their responsibilities and relevant due dates. In recent years, Council has used SMS and email messages to remind ratepayers of due dates and impending action. Whilst Council prefers not to take legal action, in some cases it is necessary. Any account that is referred to debt collection is only referred after *at least* an annual notice and Final Notice have been sent to the recorded address of the ratepayer,

All fees and court costs incurred will be recoverable from the ratepayer and remain a charge against the property until they are paid.

If an amount payable by way of rates in respect to land has been in arrears for three years or more, Council may take action to sell the property in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* Section 181.

5.1. User Fees and Charges

User fees and charges are those that Council will charge for the delivery of services and use of community infrastructure.

Examples of user fees and charges include:

- Kindergarten and Childcare fees
- Transfer Station and Waste Disposal fees
- Aged and Health Care service fees
- Leases and facility hire fees

The provision of infrastructure and services form a key part of council's role in supporting the local community. In providing these, council must consider a range of 'Best Value' principles including service cost and quality standards, value-for-money, and community expectations and values. Council must also balance the affordability and accessibility of infrastructure and services with its financial capacity and in the interests of long-term financial sustainability.

Councils must also comply with the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy for significant business activities they provide and adjust their service prices to neutralise any competitive advantages when competing with the private sector.

In providing services to the community, council must determine the extent of cost recovery for particular services consistent with the level of both individual and collective benefit that the services provide and in line with the community's expectations.

Services are provided on the basis of one of the following pricing methods:

- a. Market Price**
- b. Full Cost Recovery Price**
- c. Subsidised Price**

Market pricing (A) is where council sets prices based on the benchmarked competitive prices of alternate suppliers. In general market price represents full cost recovery plus an allowance for profit. Market prices will be used when other providers exist in the given market, and council needs to meet its obligations under the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy.

It should be noted that if a market price is lower than council's full cost price, then the market price would represent council subsidising that service. If this situation exists, and there are other suppliers existing in the market at the same price, this may mean that council is not the most efficient supplier in the marketplace. In this situation, council will consider whether there is a community service obligation and whether council should be providing this service at all.

Full cost recovery price (B) aims to recover all direct and indirect costs incurred by council. This pricing should be used in particular where a service provided by council benefits individual customers specifically, rather than the community as a whole. In principle, fees and charges should be set at a level that recovers the full cost of providing the services unless there is an overriding policy or imperative in favour of subsidisation.

Subsidised pricing (C) is where council subsidises a service by not passing the full cost of that service onto the customer. Subsidies may range from full subsidies (i.e. council provides the service free of charge) to partial subsidies, where council provides the service to the user with a discount. The subsidy can be funded from council's rate revenue or other sources such as Commonwealth and state funding programs. Full council subsidy pricing and partial cost pricing should always be based on knowledge of the full cost of providing a service.

As per the Victorian Auditor General's Office report "*Fees and charges – cost recovery by local government*" recommendations, council has developed a user fee pricing policy to help guide the fair and equitable setting of prices. The policy outlines the process for setting fee prices and includes such principles as:

- Both direct and indirect costs to be taken into account when setting prices;
- Accessibility, affordability and efficient delivery of services must be taken into account; and
- Competitive neutrality with commercial providers.

Council will develop a table of fees and charges as part of its annual budget each year. Proposed pricing changes will be included in this table and will be communicated to stakeholders before the budget is adopted, giving them the chance to review and provide valuable feedback before the fees are locked in.

5.2. Statutory Fees and Charges

Statutory fees and fines are those which council collects under the direction of legislation or other government directives. The rates used for statutory fees and fines are generally advised by the state government department responsible for the corresponding services or legislation, and generally councils will have limited discretion in applying these fees.

Examples of statutory fees and fines include:

- Planning and subdivision fees
- Building and Inspection fees
- Infringements and fines
- Land Information Certificate fees

Penalty and fee units are used in Victoria's Acts and Regulations to describe the amount of a fine or a fee.

Penalty units

Penalty units are used to define the amount payable for fines for many offences. For example, the fine for selling a tobacco product to a person aged under 18 is four penalty units.

One penalty unit is currently \$165.22, from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

The rate for penalty units is indexed each financial year so that it is raised in line with inflation. Any change to the value of a penalty unit will happen on 1 July each year.

Fee units

Fee units are used to calculate the cost of a certificate, registration or licence that is set out in an Act or Regulation. For example, the cost of depositing a Will with the Supreme Court registrar of probates is 1.6 fee units.

The value of one fee unit is currently \$14.81. This value may increase at the beginning of a financial year, at the same time as penalty units.

The cost of fees and penalties is calculated by multiplying the number of units by the current value of the fee or unit. The exact cost may be rounded up or down.

5.3. Grants

Grant revenue represents income usually received from other levels of government. Some grants are singular and attached to the delivery of specific projects, whilst others can be of a recurrent nature and may or may not be linked to the delivery of projects.

Council will pro-actively advocate to other levels of government for grant funding support to deliver important infrastructure and service outcomes for the community. Council may use its own funds to leverage higher grant funding and maximise external funding opportunities.

When preparing its financial plan, council considers its project proposal pipeline, advocacy priorities, upcoming grant program opportunities, and co-funding options to determine what grants to apply for.

Council will only apply for and accept external funding if it is consistent with the Community Vision and does not lead to the distortion of Council Plan priorities.

Grant assumptions are then clearly detailed in council's budget document. No project that is reliant on grant funding will proceed until a signed funding agreement is in place.

5.4. Contributions

Contributions represent funds received by council, usually from non-government sources, and are usually linked to projects. Contributions can be made to council in the form of either cash payments or asset hand-overs.

Examples of contributions include:

- Monies collected from developers under planning and development agreements
- Monies collected under developer contribution plans and infrastructure contribution plans
- Contributions from user groups towards upgrade of facilities
- Assets handed over to council from developers at the completion of a subdivision, such as roads, drainage, and streetlights.

Contributions should always be linked to a planning or funding agreement. Council will not undertake any work on a contribution-funded project until a signed agreement outlining the contribution details is in place.

Contributions linked to developments can be received well before any council expenditure occurs. In this situation, the funds will be identified and held separately for the specific works identified in the agreements.

5.5. Interest on Investments

Council receives interest on funds managed as part of its investment portfolio, where funds are held in advance of expenditure, or for special purposes. The investment portfolio is managed per council's investment policy, which seeks to earn the best return on funds, whilst minimising risk.

5.6. Borrowings

Whilst not a source of income, borrowings can be an important cash management tool in appropriate circumstances. All borrowings must be undertaken in accordance with Council's Borrowing Policy.