

SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

AGENDA – 9 JUNE 2023

MEETING (DELIBERATIONS):

The meeting will be held in the Supper Room, Texas Street, Martinborough and will commence at 10.00am. The meeting will be held in public with the express purpose of deliberations on the Annual Plan 2023/24.

- 1. Karakia
- 2. Apologies
- 3. Conflicts of Interest
- 4. Deliberations

Recommended Council Resolution (required from 3:30pm):

That the Annual Plan 2023/24 deliberations meeting on **9 June 2023** continue beyond the six-hour time limit on meetings prescribed by South Wairarapa District Council's Standing Orders.



South Wairarapa District Council Kia Reretahi Tātau

> 9 June 2023 Agenda Item: 4

Annual Plan 2023/24 Deliberations Report

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the analysis of the submissions on the Annual Plan 2023/24 and for elected members to give direction to Council staff on preparing the final draft Annual Plan.

A full package of all submissions has been provided as part of the Annual Plan Hearings Report.

2. Executive Summary

The purpose of the deliberations process is for elected members to give council officers clear direction on preparing the final draft of the annual plan, considering community engagement and consultation, legislation, alignment with key strategic documents, and officer advice.

The annual plan sets the budget for the next twelve months and describes the activity and spending that Council expects to deliver. This annual plan is the third and final of the current Long-Term Plan (LTP). We have many complex issues that we must address that will take much longer than twelve months to resolve.

Feedback through the consultation process has highlighted the importance of focusing on infrastructure, especially water. There is significant tension between adequate spending to deliver service levels and the financial impact it places on ratepayers. This report outlines the consultation process, offers a high-level analysis and summary of the feedback, and offers 4 options for direction setting.

As part of preparing for the Long-Term Plan, service levels and resources will be reviewed to ensure that the organisation is operating in a prudent and efficient manner. Recruitment to vacancies (as usual practice) will include a review of the role and require approval by the CEO.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Council:

- 1. Receive the Deliberations Report.
- 2. Consider the options provided.
- 3. Provide council officers with direction on the options to prepare the final draft of the Annual Plan.

4. Note that a Council meeting is scheduled for 28 June 2023 to consider the adoption of the Annual Plan for the 2023-24 financial year as per Section 95 of the Local Government Act 2002.

4. Background

Under the Local Government Act 2002, Council must produce an LTP every three years. For the two years between each LTP (Years 2 and 3 of the LTP) an Annual Plan must be produced. In the third year, a new LTP is developed.

The Annual Plan process provides an opportunity to review intended work programmes, levels of service, and associated budgets taking into consideration any new information and/or changing circumstances. According to section 95(5) of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act), the purpose of the Annual Plan is to:

- a) contain the proposed annual budget and funding impact statement for the year [of the long-term plan] to which the annual plan relates; and
- b) identify any variation from the financial statements and funding impact statement included in the local authority's long-term plan in respect of the year; and
- c) provide integrated decision making and co-ordination of the resources of the local authority; and
- d) contribute to the accountability of the local authority to the community.

The 2023/24 Annual Plan is Year 3 of the 2021-31 Long-Term Plan (LTP).

On 26 April 2023 Council adopted the Annual Plan 2023/24 Consultation Document. Consultation on an Annual Plan is required to meet the principles of consultation as specified in Section 82 of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA). The Special Consultative Procedure (SCP) as prescribed in Section 83 of the LGA was followed. The SCP complies with Section 82 requirements.

5. Discussion

5.1 Consultation Process

Consultation on the Annual Plan 2023/24 occurred between 27 April 2023 and 28 May 2023. The Annual Plan 2023/24 Consultation Document and submission forms were available on our website, from the Council office and the three libraries. The opportunity to submit was widely advertised to our community through social media and advertising in the Midweek. Elected members and staff hosted 2 drop-in sessions in each of the three towns (Featherston, Greytown, and Martinborough) to raise awareness and for the community to ask questions about the consultation topics. Community drop-in sessions were also held at Tora/Te Awaiti, Cape Palliser/Ngawi,

Kitchener's café, and a Wisdom and Wellbeing seniors' group in Featherston. An engagement session was also offered to mana whenua.

The Māori Standing Committee and Community Boards were actively invited to participate in the consultation process, and all have made separate submissions to the Annual Plan.

5.2 Annual Plan Submissions

A total of 180 submissions were received on the Annual Plan 2023/24 and 28 submitters requested to speak to their submissions. 121 submissions were made online, using the online platform (SurveyMonkey). 33 completed their submission on the physical submission form and 26 provided their submission via email or letter.

An analysis of the addresses provided indicates that 86 (48%) submitters live in rural areas and 94 (52%) submitters live in urban areas.

Total Number of Formal Submissions	Total Number of Submissions Related to the Consultation Document	Total Number of Submissions Not Related to the Consultation Document	Total Number of Submissions Requested to be Heard	Total Number of Additional Correspondence Considered
180	167	13	28/180	165 questions via 23 emails to submissions@swdc
				74 specific questions via LGOIMA
				6 drop-in sessions
				1 café session
				2 rural public meetings
				1 seniors meeting

5.3 Options

Based on the consultation process, these options are presented for consideration. Other combinations can be explored.

Option 1: The least supported water budget option through consultation with the lowest rates impact.

- option 1 water
- keep the rural road reserve at \$300k
- remove the budget for library casual staff
- remove the budget for community grants

Option 2: Significant community support for increased budget allocation to improve the condition and maintenance of our water assets, with no additional impact on rural ratepayers.

- option 2 water
- keep the rural road reserve at \$300k
- remove the budget for library casual staff
- remove the budget for community grants

Option 3: Significant community support for increased budget allocation to improve the condition and maintenance of our water assets, with additional impact on rural ratepayers through an increase to the rural road reserve.

- option 2 water
- increase the rural road reserve to \$500k
- remove the budget for library casual staff
- remove the budget for community grants

Option 4: Significant community support for increased budget allocation to improve the condition and maintenance of our water assets, with additional impact on rural ratepayers through an increase to the rural road reserve, and a nominal budget increase for community grants.

- option 2 water
- increase the rural road reserve to \$500k
- remove the budget for library casual staff
- allocate \$100k to community grants (a reduction from \$175K in the previous year)

While not included in the options presented for consultation, it is worth noting that project management for the Long-Term Plan (as recommended in the BDO report) is not included in the budget.

6. Analysis of Annual Plan Submissions

6.1 Consultation Topics

The Annual Plan process provides an opportunity to review what was planned for the year in the relevant Long-Term Plan taking into consideration any new information and/or changing circumstances. Having considered work programmes and budgets for the year, Council agreed to consult on the following four topics for the Annual Plan 2023/24:

1. Keep the LTP Year-3 water budget of \$3.541 million (including inflation) or increase the budget to reduce legal, health and safety, and plant failure risks.

- 2. Keep the current \$300,000 annual Rural Road Reserve contributions or increase it to provide a buffer during times of urgent need.
- 3. Include a budget of \$165,000 for a pool of casual Library staff to cover leave or remove the use of a pool of casual staff that will result in libraries being closed more often.
- 4. Keep or remove the community and youth grants scheme.

6.1.1. Water Budget

141 submitters responded to the question on water budgets. Of these submitters:

- 27.66% supported keeping the LTP Year-3 water budget of \$3.541 million, not maintaining current levels of service (included in the proposed budget).
- 40.34% indicated support for increasing the budget to \$4.9 million, improving the ability to meet current levels of service, with some gaps.
- 31.91% supported increasing the budget to Wellington Water Limited's (WWL) recommended level of \$7.496 million (including inflation).
- Overall, 72.25% of submitters supported increasing the WWL budget.



Overall, comments related to water were supportive of increasing the budget and the prioritization of safe water.

"Providing safe water systems is a basic responsibility that should take priority over other discretionary expenditure and nice-to-haves."

"The current proposal is completely inappropriate. Cutting the maintenance team is ridiculous. How can you propose going with an option that would probably make our water situation worse than it is currently?"

"It is arrogant that you would put in an option for us to choose that states that you can't even 'maintaining current levels of service'. Give us an option under the current economic environment where we can choose to flat line costs."

"GOT to be done, though costly."

"Option 3 is the only supportable option. Option 1 risks our citizens' health and prosecution for the council. Would councillors really want to tell the court that they prioritized a balanced budget over health, welfare and legal requirements? Option 2 is little better than option 1. Option 3 has to be the preferred option."

Many submissions also called for increased performance and accountability of Wellington Water Limited.

"Leave WWL and start making some ACTUAL progress on 3 waters infrastructure upgrades."

"I've witnessed Wellington Water making multiple attempts to repair a minor leak. Turnout of about 12 staff and 10 vehicles on each occasion. Improved governance of Council contractors would be money well spent."

"Wellington Water needs to be held to account for the services it delivers if this increased budget is approved. SWDC needs to do better in managing this contract."

"If WW did their job properly first time it would not have to be repeated 3 or 4 times over."

"Wellington Water?? Why?? Different options."

"Find ways to save money, wwl too much wasteful spending."

6.1.2. Rural Roading Reserve

140 submitters responded to the question on the rural roading reserve. Of these submitters:

- 37.86% supported keeping the current budget of \$300,000 p.a. which will likely not meet the Council's foreseeable requirements to fund emergency works (included in the proposed budget).
- 37.14% Increase the budget to \$500,000 p.a. which will provide a greater level of reserves for Council to draw on to fund emergency works.
- 25.00% Increase the budget to \$1 million p.a. which will enable more essential work to be completed and a reserve built up for future use.
- Overall, 62.14% of submitters supported increasing the rural roading reserve budget.



Overall, comments related to rural roading were supportive of more equitable funding of rural roads across all ratepayers. Submitters indicated that rural roading cost should be distributed across all ratepayers, not just those who live rurally.

"Roading costs need to spread amongst all ratepayers... Urban and rural"

"Rural roads (see page 2, Wairarapa Times-Age 5 May 2023) are for the use of everyone, not just the people who live in rural areas. Therefore, contributions to the Rural Road Reserve should be made by all ratepayers. This burden should not be carried by rural ratepayers alone."

"In the future, the council should reconsider how the rural road reserve is funded as these roads are used by all South Wairarapa residents as well as tourists. It seems unfair that rural rate payers are responsible for the reserve fund as these roads are the most affected in a natural disaster."

"I object to the funding of the rural road reserve through rural ratepayers only. Rural roads are assets that have variable utility to all ratepayers and beyond. Usage of these roads by residents and non-residents will vary. However, their availability to everyone is universal."

"Urban ratepayers/tourists use rural roads this should be spread across all ratepayers. \$1 million would be better but cost would increase rates too much as it only applies to rural ratepayers"

"Increase budget to \$500,000 but spread across all rate payers. Unless you are going to stop non-rural users using the roads, it's not fair they don't have to pay for at least some of the upkeep."

Several submissions also noted the current state of the rural roads and the impact of this on their lives in a variety of ways.

"We do not have a safe reliable access Road for our community and for many rural communities in the Wairarapa. This is essential to our businesses, health and safety and daily lives in the rural communities."

"Safe well maintained roads should be a minimum."

6.1.3. Casual Library Staff

152 submitters responded to the question on casual library staff. Of these submitters:

- 50.00% indicated support for Keeping the budget of \$165,000 for the cost of casual staff to keep libraries open when permanent staff are on leave (included in the proposed budget).
- 50.00% Remove the budget for the cost of casual library staff and risk continued library closures on some days of the week.



Overall, comments highlighted the importance of libraries in our community.

"Libraries are one of the most important facilities for our community."

"I support \$165,000 being budgeted for a library staff casual pool. Some of our most needy citizens rely on libraries for a wide rage of services."

"Libraries provide a vital service to the community. They are a place of connection, provide education, advice and resources Staff are entitles to annual leave and the service should not be affected. All South Wairarapa libraries are well utilised throughout the District." *"I appreciate the need to be seen to be cost cutting but this cost saving is minimal for the service it provides."*

"I am sure there are plenty of other council operations that could be cut or reduced rather than threatening to take away this community service."

Council should explore opportunities to delivery library services in more innovative and efficient ways.

"Libraries can provide a useful service, but it would not be acceptable to prioritise discretionary expenditure on library services while not prioritising expenditure to ensure safe water for the community."

"\$165,000 for library staff if absolutely absurd when we have failing infrastructure."

"Water is more important than libraries. If you can't afford water, you can't afford librarians."

"Share library spaces with other council access: transparency with services provided and shared services. ie. Call the Library a Library/Service Centre."

"We must seek community involvement through volunteer work to bolster our staff but this program needs to stay."

"Have other Council staff re deployed to these facilities when the staff are sick or away, the Library budget is quite excessive so is the budget for these also covering the whole building as in Martinborough and Greytown's town halls."

"Why not put it out to the community for say a pool of volunteers to cover when staff are not available. I'm sure there are lots of avid book readers who would love to volunteer at a library."

"Use volunteer or council staff when only one staff member available to ensure Libraries can be kept open without increasing spend. Could reduce library costs by creative use of options. Libraries are amazing facility but reducing hours by small amount across three libraries might be a necessary saving message."

6.1.4. Community & Youth Grants

149 submitters responded to the question on community and youth grants. Of these submitters:

- 63.09% supported Keep the current budget of \$170,000 (included in the proposed budget).
- 36.91% supported do not provide any Community and Youth grants in 2023/2024



Overall, comments highlighted the importance of community and youth grants on our community wellbeing.

"Community Grants are an essential part of Council's delivery as they support our many community organisations to deliver services to all demographics in our community. It is a small price to pay to see needs and initiatives met and delivered. Council does not have the inhouse resource to support total delivery of community initiatives."

"Our youth should not suffer for our incompetence and short sighted planning."

"The Youth grant enables Featherston Booktown to provide an extraordinary experience for 1500 students throughout the south Wairarapa and the region. This contributes to increased engagement in literacy, aids well being, giving our rangatahi many more options for life success. This is a jewel in the SWDC crown."

"There seems a lack of youth funded activities - this is such a small amount of money it wont make a huge difference to rates but could make a difference to some essential activities. we should be looking at other cost saving options."

"I think it's important to keep the funding in place, particularly for youth grants. We live somewhere where getting youth involved in activities is a must."

Many submissions suggested a reduced budget and noted the need to focus on core Council business in the current climate.

"Not core Council business."

"You can't afford to provide grants if you can't afford to give us safe water."

"Expenditure on grants seems incredibly unimportant if the council can't afford to provide safe water."

"Yip explain it was about choices and the staff spent the money on EVs, furniture, BBQs, and wasting time on subdividing when no new consents will be granted for two years. You cannot afford it."

"Could some, or all of the \$170k budgeted be used to provide rates relief for our local charitable organisations?"

"LOWER IT TO \$120, 000"

"50% cut for 2023/2024"

6.2 Māori Standing Committee and Community Board Submissions

Community Boards are named in the LGA 2002 as making a submission to Council on its Annual Plan. Each of the community boards have been supported to develop a community plan at the beginning of the triennium. The Māori Standing Committee (MSC) has actively requested to be involved in the annual planning process. All three community boards and the MSC have made submissions for consideration by Council.

The MSC has specifically requested consideration be given to the maintenance of the urupa at Kohunui Marae, Whakatomotomo, and Pāpāwai Marare. They have also requested funding for a series of pou in each town and memorial works to acknowledge the fallen Māori soldiers of South Wairarapa.

The Martinborough Community Board (MCB) have significant concerns about the impact of the wastewater treatment system and call for the urgent delivery of a plan to resolve the issues. They would also like to strengthen and encourage the social connections of the town and see the use of the Waihinga Centre as an opportunity to achieve this. They would like to see a greater emphasis on public safety and access including the lighting of pedestrian crossings. The MCB sees value in ensuring the maintenance of rural roads to mitigate storm damage. They also have raised concerns about expenditure and the standard of basic financial record keeping and would like to see Council held to account in this area.

The Greytown Community Board (GCB) has submitted their community plan which prioritises four areas of action:

- Emergency response and ongoing community resilience
- Culture and heritage
- Tourism and economic opportunities
- Community as a whole

They have a comprehensive list of activities including the delegating of the local parks and reserves to the community board, building a relationship with mana whenua, supporting community activities, advocating for green spaces, improving accessibility, community housing, and promoting the culture and history of Greytown.

Featherston Community Board (FCB) also submitted their community plan with a simple vision of "a thriving future – for community, for our grandchildren, for the environment." The FCB community plan takes a strategic approach and describes principles and goals rather than activities and has prioritised community resilience planning. There is a strong focus on acknowledging mana whenua, greening Featherston, affordable housing, economic development, and creating a positive future for the town and its residents.

6.3 Community Sentiment

In addition to the consultation questions, many submitters provided more general feedback. It is important to note that 180 submissions represent less than 2% of our total population. Formal submission processes can be daunting for many and often a very specific segment of the community participates.

Throughout the consultation process, there were 165 questions submitted via email, a further ten Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act requests with 75 questions, in addition to drop-in sessions, community meetings, and social media. This section considers, both formal submissions and more general community sentiment received over the past month (the quotes provided are from written feedback).

6.3.1. Focus on Essential Services and Infrastructure:

There was strong feedback on the need to prioritise water and roading services over non-essential services. There is a tension to be navigated when considering this feedback, noting that water and roading account for over 50% of the total cost of the services the council provides. Increases in spending on infrastructure have the biggest impact on rates. Many comments talked about focusing on the *basics* or *core* council services, but what is important to one sector of the community can be less important to other sectors.

"Stick to basic council work, start looking at saving money."

"SWDC should deliver core services well."

"It is obvious that investment in essential infrastructure has not been carried out over many years. The chicken has come home to roost and unless things change future years will see more of the same."

"Focus on infrastructure first."

"SWDC only needs to concentrate on the basic's, roading and water."

"Keep to core interests: roading, water, keeping rates down, rubbish."

"Stick to basic council work, start looking at saving money."

"...we think it critical that council (hence ratepayers) have a clear idea of exactly what constitutes an "essential service". At present there seems to be considerable confusion surrounding this issue, hence the options for cost-savings."

"Concentrate on need to have facilities rather than nice to have (e.g. cycle ways)."

6.3.2. Rates Affordability:

Many residents spoke about either their personal financial hardship or were concerned about other people in the community experiencing financial hardship. There were questions about what practical support and financial relief the council could provide for those who struggled to pay their rates. *"The ratepayers cannot continually be lumped with increased rates like this. It is not sustainable."*

"Generally speaking I am happy with paying higher rates for services. Having said this I know there are a lot of cost pressures for households at the moment."

"I would like to see support to residents, the rates increases during a cost of living crisis means a lot of people are being financially squeezed."

"We need to live within our means and if that means not having some facilities that are 'nice to have' then we should do without them."

"Sympathize with ratepayers facing rate hikes larger than anywhere else in NZ."

"Cost of living is dire for older people on limited funds."

"...our of proportion proposed rates increase for urban and rural is very, very unfair."

"...what do I get for the rates? I've got half a farm under water, Government on our backs about this, that and the other and then you people spring this on us. Are you aware how much the rural sector is struggling? Do you actually care?"

"...you are asking us to dig deeper into our pockets to fund what is clearly major inadequate spending by the South Wairarapa District Council. I fear that in imposing an increase on rates of 29% that you will force many farmers off their land."

"Ratepayers are facing rising costs on many fronts and those on low or fixed incomes are struggling to cope."

"We face a 28.9% rise in rates, nearly 3x that of our fully-serviced neighbours across the fence. Is that fair? We think the SWDC needs to undertake an immediate review of the situation with lifestyle properties."

"I want to live in an area where I am happy that my council is being prudent with spending whilst making sure that we are managing our resources like water and waste well for the future."

6.3.3. Innovation and Efficiencies:

Some feedback offered potential solutions and options for reducing costs or increasing income to lessen the reliance on rates.

"Better use of council facilities for community and commercial activities that could generate income to offset costs."

"Why not sell some land to generate funds. "Waiting for a rainy day" - it IS a raining day!!!"

"Increase borrowing."

"...have you considered reducing the number of councillors per town to two? Also cutting the pay of the CEO?"

"Diversifying and considering alternative funding and revenue sources for council, including increasing debt levels to fund investment, targeted charges and cost recovery."

"Additional borrowings can certainly be made within the quantified limits for debt affordability and debt servicing. Properly managed, debt is an appropriate funding tool for councils to use."

"Strengthen links to other local councils share policy, staff, services to save costs for SWDC."

"Can some assets like 85-87 West Street, Greytown be sold? Could a mobile library work within the community..."

"...borrowing to invest in infrastructure has to be good for us."

"Surely this "Three Waters" money should be prioritized for expenditure on our most urgent water infrastructure needs?"

"Amalgamate regional council resources to capture synergies, enhance resilience, and eliminate duplication."

"...better use of council facilities eg Waihinga centre for community and also commercial activities that could generate income to offset costs."

6.3.4. Heavy Criticism and Lack of Confidence in Council:

There has been a constant barrage of criticism received by both staff and elected members during the annual plan consultation process. The level of trust and confidence in the council to carry out its work (social license) remains very low.

"Review the number of staff at SWDC. Review the number of company vehicles. Look at revenue-generating activities because you are FAILING."

"The SWDC Council staffing is over the top for the size of the rating base. Reduce!"

"Can we do a human resources review of council to trim down the expenditure of what I largely see as a small council spending like a big council on; comms, consultancy fees and the like."

"The consultation document does not hold or link to sufficient detailed information to make informed or critical decisions.... Epic Fail!"

"Rigorous review of delivery of council services in order to focus on efficient delivery of governance responsibilities and effective communication with ratepayers."

"The consultation document suggests to me that an independent internal efficiency review is required of this council in "addition" to a thorough rates review. I want to see more transparency with DETAILED costs and spend."

"The only thing I want is for Council to restructure SWDC. Lower salaries. Less people... I also think Council need to flush their heads down the toilet and wake up... Fire the senior mgmt team at council. Get some people in there who arn't stupid!" "Place a hiring freeze on non-essential roles in council and re-spread money into infrastructure or get rid of over paid consultants. Another way of saving money is to have an independent review of the roles of members of SWDC, and a review of their salaries."

"Councillors should be giving guidance to staff as to the outcome(s) they wish to achieve. In the absence of a 'top down' approach, there is a real risk of the tail wagging the dog and, to extend the analogy, some might say creating a 'dog's breakfast' of staff aspirations only slightly tempered by councillor inputs at the end of a rushed process."

"One obvious question not dealt with in the document is why SWDC so often resorts to the use of consultants and contractors when it has a large complement of well-paid staff? Why isn't more work done in-house?"

6.3.5. Climate Change Concerns:

There is an emphasis on climate change mitigation, exploring technologies to reduce emissions, and banning open fires. The community recognizes the need for measures to address potential risks and ensure the safety of communities in the face of climaterelated events.

"More active measures are needed to mitigate climate change."

"I would like the Council to pro-actively take steps to mitigate the impact of its actions on the climate."

"Advocate for transport options and technology that minimise carbon emissions.

Look at the impacts of climate change and listen to your Community for solutions."

6.4 Looking to the Future

The Annual Plan consultation took the opportunity to seek feedback that will help shape the 2024-34 Long-Term Plan. The community were invited to provide initial feedback on the priority outcomes and strategic drivers in the current Long-Term Plan. Feedback received will be shared with Council once the analysis is complete. There will be further opportunities for the community to have their say on the 2024-34 Long-Term Plan over the next 12 months.

7. Next Steps

At the conclusion of deliberations, council officers will be tasked with preparing the final draft of the budget for the Annual Plan.

There is a tight turnaround time that will need to be factored into any direction setting.

- Council officers have a maximum of seven working days to prepare the final budget.
- The next draft Annual Plan will be presented to councillors at a workshop on Wednesday 21 June for a chance to present any final feedback.
- The final draft Annual Plan will be made public by CoB on Friday 23 June as part of Wednesday 28 June meeting agenda.
- The final draft Annual Plan will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on Wednesday 28 June.

8. Summary of Considerations

8.1 Significant risk register

Relationship with iwi, hapū, Māori
Climate Change
Emergency Management
IT architecture, information system, information management, and security
Financial management, sustainability, fraud, and corruption
Legislative and regulative reforms
Social licence to operate and reputation
Asset management
Economic conditions
Health and Safety

Assessment of risks have been incorporated into the Annual Plan planning and consultation processes to this point.

Contact Officer:Amanda Bradley, General Manager; Policy and GovernanceReviewed By:Paul Gardner, Interim Chief Executive Officer