



Ararat Rural City

AGENDA

COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday 27 January 2026

**To be held in the Council Chambers, Shire Offices
(Livestreamed)**

Commencing at 6.00pm

Council:

Cr Bob Sanders (Mayor)

Cr Jo Armstrong

Cr Rob Armstrong

Cr Peter Joyce

Cr Teli Kaur

Cr Luke Preston

Cr Bill Waterston

A recording of this meeting is being made for the purpose of verifying the accuracy of the minutes of the Council Meeting.

The recording is being streamed live via Facebook, to improve transparency between council and the community and give more people the opportunity to view what decisions are being made. You do not require a Facebook account to watch the live broadcast, simply enter www.facebook.com/araratruralcitycouncil into your address bar.

Recordings of Council Meetings (excluding closed sessions) are made available on Council's website.

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SECTION 1 - PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 LIVE STREAMING

Council is keen to engage with members of the community and live streams the formal Council Meetings to make them accessible. The stream is available to view on Council's Facebook page from 6pm and on Council's website following the Council Meeting.

1.2 TRADITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/OPENING PRAYER/COUNCILLORS PLEDGE

Traditional acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we humbly ask you to help us, as elected Councillors of the Ararat Rural City Council. Guide our deliberations. Prosper what is your will for us, to your honour and glory and for the welfare and benefit of the people whom we serve in the Ararat Rural City.

Councillors Pledge

We will faithfully and impartially carry out and exercise the functions, powers, authorities and discretions invested in us under the *Local Government Act 2020* and any other Act to the best of our skill and judgement.

1.3 APOLOGIES

RECOMMENDATION

That the apology of Cr be accepted.

1.4 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RECOMMENDATION

That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 25 November 2025 be confirmed.

1.5 DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A Councillor who has a conflict of interest in a matter being considered at a *Council meeting* at which he or she:

- 1 is present must disclose that conflict of interest by explaining the nature of the conflict of interest to those present at the *Council meeting* immediately before the matter is considered; or
- 2 intends to be present must disclose that conflict of interest by providing to the *Chief Executive Officer* before the *Council meeting* commences a written notice:
 - (a) advising of the conflict of interest;
 - (b) explaining the nature of the conflict of interest; and
 - (c) detailing, if the nature of the conflict of interest involves a Councillor's relationship with or a gift from another person, the:
 - name of the other person;
 - nature of the relationship with that other person or the date of receipt, value and type of gift received from the other person; and
 - nature of that other person's interest in the matter,and then immediately before the matter is considered at the meeting announcing to those present that he or she has a conflict of interest and that a written notice has been given to the *Chief Executive Officer* under this sub-Rule.

The Councillor must, in either event, leave the *Council meeting* immediately after giving the explanation or making the announcement (as the case may be) and not return to the meeting until after the matter has been disposed of.

SECTION 2 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

2.1 PETITIONS AND JOINT LETTERS

- 1 Unless *Council* determines to consider it as an item of urgent business, no motion (other than a motion to receive the same) may be made on any petition, joint letter, memorial or other like application until the next *Council meeting* after that at which it has been presented.
- 2 It is incumbent on every Councillor presenting a petition or joint letter to acquaint himself or herself with the contents of that petition or joint letter, and to ascertain that it does not contain language disrespectful to *Council*.
- 3 Every Councillor presenting a petition or joint letter to *Council* must:
 - write or otherwise record his or her name at the beginning of the petition or joint letter; and
 - confine himself or herself to a statement of the persons from whom it comes, the number of signatories to it, the material matters expressed in it and the text of the prayer or request.
- 4 Every petition or joint letter presented to *Council* must be in *writing* (other than pencil), typing or printing, contain the request of the petitioners or signatories and be signed by at least 12 people.
- 5 Every petition or joint letter must be signed by the persons whose names are appended to it by their names or marks, and, except in cases of incapacity or sickness, by no one else and the address of every petitioner or signatory must be clearly stated.
- 6 Any signature appearing on a page which does not bear the text of the whole of the petition or request may not be considered by *Council*.
- 7 Every page of a petition or joint letter must be a single page of paper and not be posted, stapled, pinned or otherwise affixed or attached to any piece of paper other than another page of the petition or joint letter.
- 8 If a petition, joint letter, memorial or other like application relates to an operational matter, *Council* must refer it to the *Chief Executive Officer* for consideration.

SECTION 3 - REPORTS REQUIRING COUNCIL DECISION

3.1 CONSIDERATION OF ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26438

OFFICER DECLARATION OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report is prepared in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020, Local Government Act 1989 and Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014.

The Annual Report 2024/2025 will be forwarded to the Minister for Local Government once complete. It is important to note that adoption of the 2024/2025 has been delayed due to approval of the 2024/2025 annual accounts by the Victorian Auditor General's Office. Failure to adopt the Annual Report 2024/2025 was reported to Council's Audit and Risk Committee and Local Government Victoria. The failure to meet the prescribed timeframe was subsequently investigated by the Local Government Inspectorate, who have found that it only represented a technical breach of the Local Government Act 2020 and no further action was taken.

The purpose of this report is to provide the opportunity for the Mayor to formally present the Annual Report 2024/2025 to Council.

DISCUSSION

The Annual Report 2024/2025 outlines the activities undertaken during the financial year.

In accordance with section 98, 99 and 100 of the Act, an Annual Report must contain the following in respect of the financial year reported on:

- Report of operations of the Council
- Audited performance statement
- Audited financial statements
- Copy of the auditor's report on the performance statement
- Copy of the auditor's report on the financial statements under Part 3 of the Audit Act 1994
- Any other matter required by the regulations

Additional information outlined in the attached Annual Report includes:

- A summary of Council's activities and performance
- Information on Council's service delivery
- Information pertaining to governance activities undertaken by Council
- Information pertaining to the structure of our organisation
- Report on Council's compliance and accountability

The Annual Report is the primary means of advising the community about Council's operations and performance during the year ended 30 June 2025.

Several highlights to note from the Annual Report 2024/2025 are as follows:

\$7.3 million secured from the Federal Government to build crucial enabling infrastructure that will support the development of up to 90 new homes in Ararat.

- A further \$1 million for the upgrade of Buangor – Ben Nevis Road, in addition to the previously committed \$2.143 million.
- \$1,490,000 secured in grant funding for a new covered sports arena for the Ararat Pony Club
- \$330,000 upgrade to Tatyoon Recreation Reserve, including a new irrigation and drainage system, which will provide a high-quality, year-round playing surface for the football and netball clubs.
- \$200,000 interior upgrade to the Ararat Library, including new flooring, mobile shelving, a new customer service desk, updated signage, two new public computers, and comfortable new furniture for reading and quiet study
- \$100,000 of grant funding secured for a new off-leash dog park at Ararat's Centenary Park.
- Completion of the Pomonal Tennis Court playing surface upgrade, which will provide a safer, high-quality playing surface for all seasons
- Continued delivery of Free TAFE Certificate 3 in Early Childhood Education and Care to the Ararat Jobs and Technology Precinct, in conjunction with Federation University Australia.
- Established a Child Friendly Cities and Communities (CFCC) Working Group to safeguard the best interests of our youngest residents, and to develop strategies to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive in our community

Issues around delay in adoption of the 2024/2025 Annual Report

Council provided its draft audited statements to the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) on 8 October 2025 and there was subsequent discussion between Council's external auditor and the Director Financial Audit at VAGO, regarding treatment of valuations of formation under road assets.

Our external auditor believed that it should be treated as a prior period error whereas VAGO considered that it should be considered a current year valuation adjustment. Following considerable consideration, it was agreed the accounting treatment should be as a prior period error. It is understood that Mr. Derricott was on leave during part of this period. Council received VAGO's Independent Auditors Report on 9 December 2025.

Council informed its Audit and Risk Committee of a likely delay in finalising the 2024/2025 annual accounts via email on 11 October 2025 and informed Local Government Victoria of its failure to meet the statutory deadline on 3 November 2025.

Council received notification from the Local Government Inspectorate, on 12 December 2025, that they wished to understand the reasons behind the failure to meet its obligations under Section 100(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2020. Council responded to the request on 17 December 2025. Council received correspondence from the Local Government Inspectorate on 30 December 2025 indicating that it was considered a technical breach of the Local Government Act and no further action will be taken.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6 STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at the centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management; and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

The Annual Report 2024/2025 reports on the progress in achieving the strategic objectives as listed in the Council Plan 2021-2025 (Year 4).

Budget Implications

Costs associated with the production of the Annual Report are included in the Budget for 2024/2025.

Policy/Relevant Law

The breach of Section 100(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2020 has been discussed in the body of the report.

Sections 98 to 100 of the Local Government Act 2020 outlines the requirements that Council must meet in preparing and considering the Annual Report for 2024/2025.

Sustainability Implications

This report does not raise any sustainability implications.

Risk Assessment

Council must meet the legislative requirements of the Act in relation to the preparation and consideration of the Annual Report 2024/2025.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

None identified.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Various Council officers have been involved in the preparation of the Annual Report 2024/2025.

Financial statements and performance statements were presented to the 14 October 2025 Council Meeting. These statements have been signed by the Victorian Auditor-General and are incorporated into the Annual Report 2024/2025.

A copy of the Annual Report 2024/2025 will be submitted to the Minister for Local Government following adoption at the January 2026 Council Meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

That

- 1. Council receive and note the Annual Report 2024/2025.**

ATTACHMENTS

A Draft copy of the Annual Report 2024/2025 is provided as Attachment 3.1

3.2 ROAD NAMING PROPOSAL - SPARROWS LANE

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26439

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its meeting held on 25 November 2025, Council resolved to advertise its intention to name the unnamed laneway adjoining 118 Barkly Street, Ararat as Sparrows Lane.

This report presents the submissions received during the consultation period and recommends that Council consider the submissions and determine whether to proceed with formally naming the laneway Sparrows Lane.

DISCUSSION

As part of the consultation process for the proposed name Sparrows Lane, adjoining ratepayers were consulted and the proposal was presented to the community for consultation and public submissions. Community feedback was invited via the Engage Ararat platform, by post, or by email between 10 December and 10 January 2026.

A total of 66 submissions were received and are provided in the attachment to this report. Of these submissions, 32 were in favour of the proposal, 29 were against, and 5 submissions were undetermined, providing comments without clearly indicating support or opposition.

Submissions demonstrated a strongly divided range of views.

Supportive submissions generally cited the historical significance of Ararat being the site of one of the first releases of sparrows in Australia and supported the recording of this event as part of the town's broader history. Several submitters noted that, while sparrows are an introduced species, the naming of the laneway was viewed as an opportunity to acknowledge history rather than celebrate it. Many supporters also welcomed the proposed public art trail, describing it as a creative enhancement to the streetscape, a point of interest for residents and visitors, and a positive contribution to Ararat's cultural and tourism offerings. Some submissions emphasised the importance of preserving history in all its forms, including events that are now understood to have had negative impacts.

Opposing submissions raised significant concerns about naming a laneway after an introduced pest species. A recurring theme was that sparrows are widely recognised as invasive, with impacts on native bird species, agriculture, and urban infrastructure. Many submitters felt that commemorating the introduction of sparrows was inappropriate in light of current environmental knowledge, and likened the proposal to naming places after other introduced pests. Several respondents suggested that the laneway name should instead reflect native wildlife, Aboriginal culture, or other aspects of Ararat's heritage.

Additional themes raised included requests that any associated artwork be locally produced and reflect Ararat's heritage character.

Overall, the consultation revealed strong community interest in the proposal, with submissions reflecting differing perspectives on how Ararat's history should be acknowledged and represented in public place naming.

Council is now asked to consider the feedback received and determine whether to proceed with formally adopting the name Sparrows Lane.

A map showing the lane and surrounding area is provided below.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6 STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at the centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management; and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications arising from this report.

Policy/Relevant Law

Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act 1989 provides Council with the power to name roads. The Geographic Place Names Act 1998 provides for the naming and registration of place names.

Sustainability Implications

There are no economic, social or environmental implications in relation to the item.

Risk Assessment

Low.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Council's intention to name the road was published on Engage Ararat. Abutting landowners and relevant stakeholders were also consulted as part of the process.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Consider submissions received during the consultation period;
2. Adopt the name Sparrows Lane; and
3. Submit Sparrows Lane to the Registrar of Geographic Names.

ATTACHMENTS

The Community Consultation Report – Road Naming Proposal, Sparrows Lane is provided as Attachment 3.2

3.3 ROAD NAMING PROPOSAL - WITHERS LANE

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26440

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council is undertaking the formal process of naming the unnamed road off Moyston-Dunkeld Road, opposite White Patch Road in Moyston.

At its meeting held on 26 August 2025, Council resolved to give public notice of its intention to name the road Prospectors Lane and to consider any submissions received during the consultation period at a future Council meeting. Council received twenty-one submissions during this consultation. Nine respondents suggested the name 'Withers Lane' instead, noting the Withers family's long-standing connection to Moyston and the Ararat district, as well as their contributions to the history of the goldfields and Eureka.

At its meeting held on 25 November 2025, Council considered the submissions received and resolved to give public notice of its intention to name the road Withers Lane, based on the submissions received, and to consider any further submissions at a future Council meeting.

This report presents the outcomes of the public consultation process for Withers Lane and recommends that Council consider the submissions received and determine whether to proceed with formally naming the road Withers Lane.

DISCUSSION

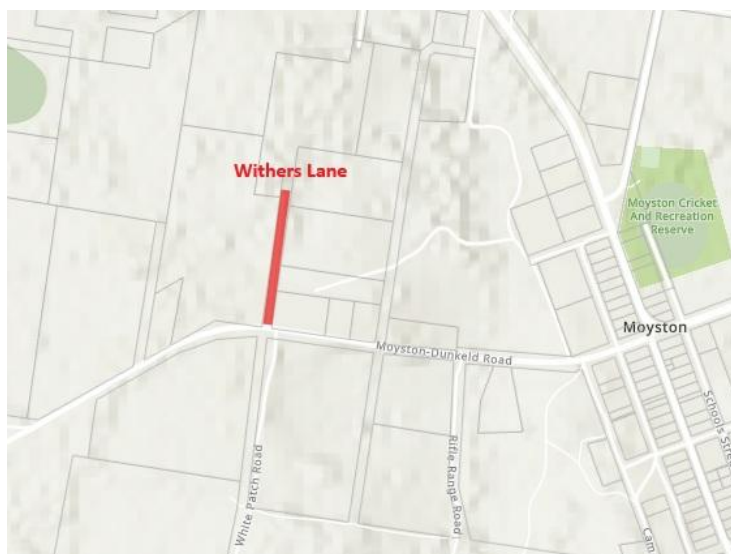
As part of the public consultation process for the proposed name Withers Lane, adjoining ratepayers were consulted and the proposal was again presented to the community for public submissions via the Engage Ararat platform. Submissions remain open for community voting in a Yes/No format until 17 January 2026.

As at 11:00am on Monday 12 January 2026, Council has received a total of fifteen submissions. Ten respondents have voted Yes in favour of the name Withers Lane, while five respondents voted No against the proposal.

Two of the submissions opposing the proposal were received via email from adjoining landholders directly impacted by the naming process. One respondent stated, *"I stand with my original suggestion of Atkins Lane,"* while another stated, *"I personally would prefer Prospectors Lane as this would be more inclusive than Withers Lane."*

Council is now asked to consider the feedback received and determine whether to proceed with formally adopting the name Withers Lane.

A map showing the road and surrounding area is provided below.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

6 STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at the centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management; and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications arising from this report.

Policy/Relevant Law

Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act 1989 provides Council with the power to name roads. The Geographic Place Names Act 1998 provides for the naming and registration of place names.

Sustainability Implications

There are no economic, social or environmental implications in relation to the item.

Risk Assessment

Low.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Council's intention to name the road was published on Engage Ararat. Abutting landowners and relevant stakeholders were also consulted as part of the process.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Consider submissions received during the consultation period;**
- 2. Adopt the name Withers Lane; and**
- 3. Submit Withers Lane to the Registrar of Geographic Names.**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item.

3.4 INSTRUMENT OF DELEGATION UNDER PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT ACT 1987 - S6A

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF OPERATOR OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26441

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider adoption of the new Instrument of Delegation under Planning & Environment Act 1987.

DISCUSSION

Delegation to Council staff is necessary to enable Council to conduct business efficiently by enabling Council staff to make routine decisions under different Acts.

Various Acts, including the Local Government Act 2020, empower Council to delegate statutory functions, powers and duties.

There have been recent changes to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (as amended) (Act) which commenced on the 25 November 2025.

The Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025 made several changes to the Act, including Council's powers and functions which may be delegated under S188. The new Delegation refers to members of Council staff under S188 of the Act.

This Delegation provides new Council powers:

- The amendments to the Act include a revised mechanism in relation to preparing amendments to the planning scheme, which will generally require authorization from the Minister as set out in the new Division 1AA of Part 3 (ss16A – 16N)
- Other changes relevant to Council relate to the abandoning of amendments, and the ability of the Minister to continue with the amendment despite the abandonment.

The Delegation repealed the following Council powers

- Some provisions of the Act have been replaced which previously set out delegable powers and functions of Council, namely in ss8A and 8B. Those powers have largely been replaced by new powers in Division 1AA of Part 3.

Other key amendments include:

- While this report includes changes required for Council's instruments, there are a number of other amendments to the Act which Council should note there include
 - Levy exemption certificates (s96UB), which Council is required to keep a record of (s 96Z)
 - Duty not to refer frivolous, vexatious or wholly irrelevant submissions to the panel (s 23(6); and;
 - The Minister being able to issue guidelines on material detriment (s52A), which Council will be required to consider (ss 52(1D), 57B92A) 96C(1A)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6. **STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications arising from the review of the S6A Instrument of Delegation – Council to Members of Council Staff under S188 of the Act.

Policy/Relevant Law

The Council is required to keep a register of delegations, and it must be made available for public inspection. This report is presented to reflect the changes in legislation and staff. The Council can amend or revoke any delegated power at any time. Council must review all delegations within a period of 12 months after a general election.

Sustainability Implications

There are no economic, social or environmental implications in relation to S6A Instrument of Delegation – Council to Members of Council Staff under S188 of the Act

Risk Assessment

The formal delegation of legislated powers, duties and functions via instruments of delegation, supported by consistent policies allows Council staff to perform day-to-day duties and make decisions that may otherwise need to be decided upon Council.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Instruments of Delegation from Council to Members of Council staff under S188 that have been created using Maddocks Lawyers Delegation Service and RelianSys software.

The Chief Executive Officer and relevant officers have reviewed this document.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

In the exercise of the powers conferred by the legislation referred to in the attached instrument of delegation, Ararat Rural City Council (Council) resolve that:

- 1. There be delegated to the members of Council staff holding, acting in or performing**
- 2. the duties of the offices or positions referred to in the attached Instrument of Delegation Council to Member of Council Staff (S6A) under S188 of the Act, the powers, duties and functions set out in that instrument, subject to the conditions and limitations specified in that Instrument;**
- 3. The instrument comes into force immediately the common seal of Council is affixed to the instrument**
- 4. On the coming into force of the instrument all previous delegations to members of Council staff (other than the Chief Executive Officer) are revoked;**
- 5. The duties and functions set out in the instrument must be executed, in accordance with any guidelines or policies of Council that it may from time to time adopts; and**
- 6. The instrument be signed under the seal of the Council.**

ATTACHMENTS

The Instrument of Delegation from Council to Members of Council Staff S6A under S188 of the Act is provided as Attachment 3.4

3.5 FRAUD AND CORRUPTION CONTROL POLICY AND FRAUD AND CORRUPTION CONTROL PLAN

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26442

OFFICER CONFLICT OF INTERESTS:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council policies are updated as part of an ongoing policy and procedure review process.

The Fraud and Corruption Control Policy has been reviewed and is presented to the January 2026 Council Meeting for consideration. The Fraud and Corruption Control Plan is also presented to Council and is used in conjunction with the Policy.

DISCUSSION

An effective Fraud and Corruption Control framework requires a policy as well as a control plan. Developing these documents also raises staff awareness and communicates Council's expectations of all Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors.

The Policy and Plan clearly documents Council's approach to controlling fraud and corruption at both strategic and operational levels.

The review of the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Plan have been conducted to reflect the policy review schedule timeframes.

The main changes to the Policy and Plan was to incorporate and reference conflicts of interest, risks connected to gifts, benefits and hospitality, increase emergency and cyber fraud as recommended by internal auditors. The other change was to expand the Audit and Risk Committee role to give great transparency of their role. Lastly, changes were made to the language to be more inclusive and minor administration.

The Fraud and Corruption Control Policy will be updated on the Council website following adoption.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.2** Ensure appropriate risk management is applied to Council and organisational decisions. Council's internal function is applied to areas of perceived risk.

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications relating to the review and adoption of the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Fraud and Corruption Control Plan.

Policy/Relevant Law

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011
Public Interests Disclosure Act 2012
Local Government Act 2020

Risk Assessment

Clarity and transparency of Council Policies.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The regular review and adoption of Council's policies will ensure that Council continues to work in accordance with its established procedures, and within legislative requirements.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Members of Council's Audit and Risk Committee have reviewed and endorsed the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy along with the Fraud and Corruption Control Plan on the 2 December 2025

The Chief Executive Officer presented the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Plan to the Councillor briefing held on 20 January 2026

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. adopt the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy; and**
- 2. adopt the Fraud and Corruption Control Plan.**

ATTACHMENTS

The Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and; the Fraud and Corruption Control Plan are provided as Attachment 3.5

3.6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26443

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 55(3) of the Local Government Act 2020 states that a Council must adopt a community engagement policy. This is a review of the Community Engagement Policy presented to the January 2026 Council Meeting for consideration

DISCUSSION

Council is committed to engaging with residents and stakeholders when making decisions that impact the community. A Community Engagement Policy required under s55 of the Local Government Act 2020, which is built on the principles of outlined in s56.

The Community Engagement Policy has been reviewed and benchmarked against like policies that have been displayed on the Local Government Inspectorate website as model policies. Main changes were in the introduction to use more welcoming language and not to have such a strong legislative tone.

The revised Community Engagement Policy will be updated on the Council website following adoption. Forms referenced in this policy will be updated to reflect any necessary changes.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.3** Continuously improved Council's community engagement process and practices in line with deliberative engagement practices, while ensuring that Councillors' roles as elected community representatives are understood and reflected in decision-making

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications arising

Policy/Relevant Law

Section 55(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 - A Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.

Section 55(3) of the Local Government Act 2020 - A Council must adopt the first community engagement policy under this section on or before 1 March 2021.

Section 56 of the Local Government Act 2020 - The Community Engagement Principles.

Sustainability Implications

There are no economic, social or environmental implications in relation to the item

Risk Assessment

Clarity and transparency of Council Policies.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

The revised policy was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on the 2 December 2025 and the Councillor briefing held on 20 January 2026

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Council adopt the Community Engagement Policy**

ATTACHMENTS

The Community Engagement Policy is provided as Attachment 3.6

3.7 COUNCIL POLICY REVIEW - COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26444

OFFICER CONFLICT OF INTERESTS:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council policies are updated as part of an ongoing policy and procedure review process.

The Complaints Handling Policy has been reviewed and is presented to the January 2026 Council Meeting for consideration:

DISCUSSION

Section 107 of the Act states that Council must develop and maintain a complaint policy. This review of the Complaints Handling Policy includes the requirements of section 107 of the Act.

The policy has also been updated utilising the model policy template outlined in the Victorian Ombudsman "Good Practice Guide to Handling Complaints 2016".

The Complaints Handling Policy has been reviewed and benchmarked against like policies that have been displayed on the Local Government inspectorate website as model policies. This policy has had some major changes to the working to make it more accessible to the general public for use and whilst covering the legislative requirements, reducing the bureaucratic jargon.

The Complaints Handling Policy will be updated on the Council website following adoption.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

Budget Implications

There are no budget implications relating to the adoption of the Complaints Handling Policy.

Policy/Relevant Law

Section 107 of the Local Government Act 2020 - A Council must develop and maintain a complaints policy.

Risk Assessment

Clarity and transparency of Council Policies.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The regular review and adoption of Council's policies will ensure that Council continues to work in accordance with its established procedures, and within legislative requirements.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

This draft policy was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on 2 December 2025.

This policy was presented the Complaints Handling Policy to the Councillor briefing held on 20 January 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Council adopt the Complaints Handling Policy.**

ATTACHMENTS

Complaints Handling Policy is provided as Attachment 3.7

3.8 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE CHARTER

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26445

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sections 53 and 54 of the *Local Government Act 2020 (the Act)* requires that Council establish an Audit and Risk Committee and adopt an Audit and Risk Committee Charter, including an Annual Work Program.

DISCUSSION

Section 53 of *the Act* requires that Council must establish an Audit and Risk Committee that must include members who are Councillors and majority of members who are not Councillors, who collectively have skills and expertise in financial management, risk and public sector management. It is important to note that no member of Council staff is to be a member of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Section 53(2) of *the Act* clearly indicates that the Audit and Risk Committee is not a delegated Committee of Council.

The Audit and Risk Committee Charter must specify the role and responsibilities of the Audit and Risk Committee including:

- monitoring the compliance of Council policies and procedures with:
 - the overarching governance principles
 - the Local Government Act 2020 and the regulations and any Ministerial directions
- monitoring Council financial and performance reporting;
- monitoring and providing advice on risk management and fraud prevention systems and controls;
- overseeing the internal and external audit functions.

The Audit and Risk Committee is required to provide the following items:

- an annual assessment of its performance against the Audit and Risk Committee Charter;
- a biannual audit and risk report that describes the activities of the Audit and Risk Committee and includes its findings and recommendations;
- an annual work plan.

The Chief Executive Officer has responsibility for ensuring that agendas and minutes of Audit and Risk Committee meetings are maintained and reporting to Council required by *the Act* is undertaken.

The annual work plan is based on the activities and functions of the Audit and Risk Committee identified in the Charter.

The membership of Council's Audit and Risk Committee is:

- Two Councillors;
- Three external members with suitable skills and experience. The Audit and Risk Committee Chair will be appointed from this group.

Councillor members are appointed annually at Council's Statutory Meeting. External members are appointed for a three-year term and may be reappointed for two additional three-year terms.

The current Audit and Risk Committee members are:

- Ms Jessica Adler (Chair)
- Mr Greg Jakob
- Ms Janet Dore
- Cr Bob Sanders
- Cr Peter Joyce

The only changes to this Charter are general review of the content and administrative changes.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

Adopting and implementing the Audit and Risk Committee Charter aligns with the following Council Plan Objectives:

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.2.** Ensure appropriate risk management is applied to Council and organisational decisions. Council's internal function is applied to areas of perceived risk.

Budget Implications

Reviewing the Audit and Risk Committee Charter will have no additional budget implications for Council.

Policy/Relevant Law

Audit and Risk Charter complies with the requirements of sections 53 and 54 of Local Government 2020 Act.

Sustainability Implications

None identified.

Risk Assessment

There are no significant risks involved in reviewing the Audit and Risk Committee Charter.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The Audit and Risk Committee will follow the work of Council's Audit Committee, in providing a driver and sounding board for organisational improvement, innovation and service review.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

The revised Audit and Risk Charter was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on 2 December 2025.

The revised Audit and Risk Charter was presented to the Council briefing on 20 January 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Council approves the Audit and Risk Charter**

ATTACHMENTS

The Audit and Risk Committee Charter is provided as attachment 3.8

3.9 2026-27 BUDGET DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26447

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council will shortly be commencing development of the 2026/27 Budget for adoption prior to 30 June 2026. The 2026/27 Budget will be developed consistent with the key financial drivers adopted at the July 2022 Council Meeting.

The Budget will be developed and go through a process of community engagement consistent with the requirements of Sections 94 and 96 of the Local Government Act 2020. A budget development and community engagement plan for the 2026/27 Budget are presented for endorsement by Council.

DISCUSSION

Section 94 of the Local Government Act 2020 requires that Council adopt a budget for 2026/27 by 30 June 2026. To meet this deadline, Council staff will develop a draft budget with proposed new initiatives and projects for presentation to Councillors in March, and undertake community consultation prior to recommending its adoption.

The 2026/27 Budget will be developed based on the Key Financial Drivers adopted by Council at the July 2022 Council Meeting. These Key Drivers are:

Rating

Maintenance of the "pie model" to provide some form of long-term rating equity and reduce rate shock across rating sectors based on annual valuation fluctuations.

Debt

Debt is only used to fund strategic infrastructure outcomes with an emphasis on intergenerational equity

Asset Preservation

Maintain the asset renewal and upgrade ratio to at least 110% of depreciation

Surplus budgets

Maintain cash and operating surpluses in each financial year

Managing expenditure

Managing expenditure is a key driver of financial sustainability at Ararat Rural City Council

Rate rises

Rate rises will be kept to a minimum based on seeking organisational efficiency. These efficiencies will be returned to the ratepayer as a dividend through lower rate rises or rate cuts.

Service standards

Expenditure savings and ratepayer dividends will not come at the price of lower service standards.

The timeframe for development and engagement of the 2026/27 Budget is summarized in the table below:

Activity	Timeframe
Budget development by Council	January - February 2026
Public release of Draft Budget	20 March 2026
Community engagement sessions	23 to 31 March 2026
Closure of public submissions	Friday 24 April 2026 (5 weeks)
Adopt 2026/27 Budget	27 May 2026

Community Engagement

Section 96 of the Local Government Act 2020 requires that Council undertake community engagement around its budget in a form that is consistent with its Community Engagement Policy. It is recommended that Council endorse a plan for community engagement for the 2026/27 budget. This will include several mechanisms of engagement including:

- use of the Engage Ararat website
- distribution of plain language budget summaries across the municipality
- face to face "town hall" meetings
- social media posts to encourage community engagement
- summaries be placed in local newspapers
- mainstream media engagement around major 2026/2027 Budget initiatives

The process is designed to ensure maximum engagement with key geographic locations and communities of interest across the municipality. Residents and ratepayers will be encouraged to engage with the budget process and to make submission on matters of interest or concern.

Engagement Activity	Timeframe
Posting of Council's 2026/27 Draft Budget on Engage Ararat	By 5:00pm on Friday 20 March 2026
Development of a summary of key budget deliverables - Distributed to sites across the municipality	31 March 2026
<p>"Town Hall" meetings in the following communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ararat • Buangor • Elmhurst • Lake Bolac • Moyston • Pomonal • Tatyoon • Willaura <p>Times and exact locations will be available on the Engage Ararat website and promoted through print and social media</p>	Between Monday 23 March and Tuesday 31 March 2026
Promotion of key budget elements across mainstream and social media	Ongoing during the budget consultation period until 30 April 2026

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

Council's Budget is a key strategic document that resources the delivery of the Council Plan 2025-29. In particular the Budget 2026/27 relates to the following:

6. **STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.1.** Deliver responsible budget outcomes, linked to strategy, that deliver value, innovation and rating fairness

Budget Implications

As this item relates to the development of the 2026/27 Budget it has no direct or significant budget implications for the 2025/26 Budget. The 2026/27 budget will be framed around the key financial drivers adopted by Council at the July 2022 Council Meeting.

Policy/Relevant Law

Sections 94 and 96 of the Local Government Act 2020 requires that Council prepare and adopt a budget for each financial year and the subsequent three financial years by 30 June each year. Section 96 requires that Council undertake community engagement around its budget in a form that is consistent with its Community Engagement Policy.

Sustainability Implications

N/A

Risk Assessment

The timeframe for development, consultation and adoption of the 2026/27 Budget by May 2026 allows for an additional time contingency of 1 month in the event of an exceptional and unforeseen event that may cause a delay to the completion of the budget setting process. This reduces the risk of the budget not being adopted by the deadline of 30 June, and enables Council staff to begin planning for the delivery of new projects and initiatives prior to the commencement of the new financial year. However, not all inputs, such as funding figures from State and Federal governments or valuations from the Valuer-General's Office may be available at this earlier timeframe. The risks associated with this are managed with fiscally conservative assumptions and forecasts on these inputs.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

This agenda item relates directly to a process of community engagement around the development of the 2026/27 Budget.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Endorse the timeframe for development and adoption of the Budget 2026/27,**
- 2. Endorse the community engagement plan relating to the 2026/27 Budget.**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item

3.10 MONTHLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26448

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The financial statements and performance indicators have been prepared for the period ended 31 December 2025.

Based on the information provided by responsible officers and managers Council's overall financial performance is in line with budget. It has been determined that a revised budget is not required at this stage.

DISCUSSION

Council must establish and maintain a budgeting and reporting framework that is consistent with the principles of sound financial management.

Key Financial information:

Income Statement (Attachment 1)

The Income Statement measures how well Council has performed from an operating nature. It reports revenues and expenditure from the activities and functions undertaken, with the net effect being a surplus or deficit. Capital expenditure is excluded from this statement, as it is reflected in the Balance Sheet.

Attachment 1 shows that Council generated \$24.606 million in revenue and \$18.628 million in expenses to 31 December 2025. This has resulted in an operating surplus of \$5.978 million for the six months ended 31 December 2025.

Income

Rates and charges account for 54% of the total budgeted income for 2025/26. Rates and charges are recognised when the rates have been raised, not when the income has been received. An amount of \$18.108 million has been recognised as income for the six months ended 31 December 2025.

User fees account for 5% of the total budgeted income for 2025/26 and \$0.976 million has been received to 31 December 2025. The majority of this relates to transfer station fees, fitness centre income and commercial waste management charges.

Recurrent Operating Grants total \$2.748 million to 31 December 2025, including \$1.253 million from the Victorian Local Government Grants Commission for general purpose grants and \$0.813 million for the local roads grants.

Non-recurrent Operating Grants total \$1.111 million to 31 December 2025. Council has been successful in obtaining several grants that had not been budgeted for, as detailed in the table below. The amounts shown as unearned income will be treated as income in future accounting periods once the performance obligations of the grant have been met.

Non-Recurrent Operating Grants	Budget 2025/26 \$'000	Income 2025/26 \$'000	Unearned Income \$'000
Ararat Housing Transition	-	-	300
Digital Twin Victoria	-	-	950
Free Public WiFi Services	-	-	1,289
Supported Playgroups	67	35	-
Ararat Rural City Sport, Active Recreation & Open Space Strategy	-	-	36
CALD Outreach Workers Initiative	129	129	-
Tiny Towns Fund - Pomonal Community Hub	-	45	75
Natural Disaster Relief	-	158	-
Council Support Fund - Pomonal Fires	-	-	-
Engage - Youth Events Activities & Happenings	55	55	-
Centenary Park Dog Park	100	8	67
Queen Street Housing Program	-	414	5,282
Ararat Hills Adventure Sports Precinct	-	-	400
Early Career Educators	-	55	48
Ararat Active Bike Network	266	-	-
Ararat City Tennis Sports Lighting and Accessibility	-	-	280
Primary Producer Support Payment	-	125	-
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund	-	50	-
Other Minor Grants (under \$30,000)	-	37	-
	617	1,111	8,727

Non-recurrent Capital Grants total \$1.157 million to 31 December 2025, as detailed in the table below. The amounts shown as unearned income will be treated as income in future accounting periods once the performance obligations of the grant have been met.

Non-Recurrent Capital Grants	Budget 2025/26 \$'000	Income 2025/26 \$'000	Unearned Income \$'000
Pedestrian Infrastructure Program	-	-	50
Tiny Towns Fund - Buangor Recreation Reserve Pavillion Redevelopment	-	-	25
Tiny Towns Fund - Buangor Cobb & Co Stables	-	29	25
Pony Club Sports Arena	1,490	55	378
Queen Street Housing Program	-	-	1,683
Ararat Library Lighting & Exterior Upgrade	-	45	6
TAC Safe Local Roads and Streets Program	-	82	409
Jack & Jill Kindergarten Upgrade	-	71	3
Mount William Road Reconstruction	-	871	1,129
Footpath-Ararat Retirement Village & Sports Precinct	-	-	35
Other Minor Grants (under \$30,000)	-	4	10
	1,490	1,157	3,753

Note

It is important to note the following:

1. The Grants Operating (recurrent) figure in the Original Budget was \$8.909 million and in the Current Budget is recorded as \$4.721 million, as \$4.188 million was paid to Council in 2024/25 by the Victorian Local Government Grants Commission (VLGGC) for the 2025/26 financial year.

Council has still received the expected VLGGC income, to be spent in 2025/26, however it will be reported over two financial years.

2. Unearned revenue received in prior years has been adjusted between the Original Budget and Current Budget with an additional \$6.659 million for Grants Operating (non-recurrent), \$0.386 million for Grants Capital (recurrent) and \$2.282 million for Grants Capital (non-recurrent) included in the Current Budget on the assumption that each of the grant projects will be completed during the 2025/26 financial year.
3. These changes in the budget, plus the note reported under expenses, create a change in the reported surplus position from a projected surplus of \$2.050 million to a surplus of \$3.028 million for 2025/26. The year-end variance is a deficit of \$0.115 million when the actual year to date expenses are compared to the year to date budget.

Expenses

Employee Costs account for approximately 37% of the total budgeted expenditure for 2025/26. For the six months ended 31 December 2025 Council has incurred \$6.486 million in employee costs.

Materials and Services account for approximately 28% of the total budgeted expenditure for 2025/26. For the six months ended 31 December 2025, Council has incurred \$6.093 million in materials and services costs. There are a number of projects, including those carried forward from 2024/25 that are expected to be completed before the end of the financial year.

Note

It is important to note the following:

There has been an increase in expenditure on materials and services from \$9.186 million in the Original Budget to \$13.357 million in the Current Budget for 2025/26. This has resulted from a carry forward amount of \$4.171 million from the 2024/25 financial year surplus and unspent grant funds which will be used to complete the projects in 2025/26.

Balance Sheet (Attachment 2)

The Balance Sheet is one of the main financial statements and reports Council's assets, liabilities and equity at a given date, in this case 31 December 2025. Comparative figures have been provided as at 30 June 2025.

Council's current assets have increased by \$10.895 million from \$17.978 million as at 30 June 2025 to \$28.873 million as at 31 December 2025. Cash and cash equivalents have increased by \$1.218 million from \$14.841 million to \$16.059 million. Trade and other receivables have increased by \$9.649 million from \$3.066 million as at 30 June 2025 to \$12.715 million as at 31 December 2025.

Total liabilities have increased from \$16.464 million in 2024/25 to \$18.023 million in 2025/26. Trade and other payables have decreased by \$2.033 million and trust funds and deposits have increased by \$0.089 million. Unearned income/revenue increased by \$3.793 million, which includes grants received by Council, where in accordance with accounting standards, they are held as a liability until grant-related performance obligations have been met.

Statement of Cash Flows (Attachment 3)

The Statement of Cash Flows shows how changes in the Statement of Financial Position and Income Statement affect Cash and Cash Equivalents, and breaks down the analysis to operating activities, investing activities and financing activities.

The Cash and Cash Equivalents at the beginning of the financial year of \$14.841 million have increased by \$1.218 million to \$16.059 million as at 31 December 2025.

Net cash of \$4.025 million was provided by operating activities, \$2.455 million was used in investing activities, and \$0.352 million was used in financing activities.

Investing activities includes payments for property, plant and equipment, and infrastructure.

Financial Performance Indicators (Attachment 4)

The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework requires Councils to report various performance indicators at the end of each financial year.

A full list of financial performance indicators is included in Attachment 4.

Indicator	30/6/2025	31/12/2025
Working capital <i>Measure - Current assets compared to current liabilities.</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework 100% to 400% Indicator of the broad objective that sufficient working capital is available to pay bills as and when they fall due. High or increasing level of working capital suggests an improvement in liquidity	122%	177%
Loans and borrowings <i>Measure - Loans and borrowings compared to rates.</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework - 0% to 70% Indicator of the broad objective that the level of interest-bearing loans and borrowings should be appropriate to the size and nature of a council's activities. Low or decreasing level of loans and borrowings suggests an improvement in the capacity to meet long term obligations	0.86%	0.44%
Indebtedness <i>Measure - Non-current liabilities compared to own source revenue</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework - 2% to 70% Indicator of the broad objective that the level of long-term liabilities should be appropriate to the size and nature of a Council's activities. Low or decreasing level of long-term liabilities suggests an improvement in the capacity to meet long term obligations	7.83%	8.70%
Rates concentration <i>Measure - Rates compared to adjusted underlying revenue</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework - 30% to 80% Indicator of the broad objective that revenue should be generated from a range of sources. High or increasing range of revenue sources suggests an improvement in stability	49.39%	77.34%
Expenditure level <i>Measure - Expenses per property assessment</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework \$2,000 to \$10,000 Indicator of the broad objective that resources should be used efficiently in the delivery of services. Low or decreasing level of expenditure suggests an improvement in organisational efficiency	\$4,936	\$2,490
Indicator - Revenue level <i>Measure - Average residential rate per residential property assessment</i> Expected values in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework - \$700 to \$2,000 Indicator of the broad objective that resources should be used efficiently in the delivery of services. Low or decreasing level of rates suggests an improvement in organisational efficiency	\$2,002	\$2,036

Indicator	30/6/2025	31/12/2025
<p>Indicator - Percentage of total rates collected</p> <p>The internal audit conducted in 2019 on Rates Revenue and Rate Debtor Management found no routine or regular reporting of large and long outstanding rates debtors.</p> <p>The outstanding Rates Debtors is reported in the Annual Financial report.</p> <p>As at 31 December 2025 the outstanding Rates Debtors totalled \$12.250 million compared to \$2.466 million as at 30 June 2025, an increase of \$9.784 million. In percentage terms 40.8% of the rates raised have been collected at 31 December 2025 compared to 31.9% up to 31 December 2024. The increased percentage at 31 December 2025 includes payments totalling \$2.491 million received under the Victorian Government's Drought Support Package for Primary Producer Support Payments, which represents a 40% rate reduction on farm-rated properties.</p> <p>Outstanding rates are currently charged 10% interest.</p> <p>Council issues approximately 7,900 rate notices. In 2025/26 there are 2,495 assessments paying by instalments compared with 2,653 assessments in 2024/25.</p>	87.8%	40.8%
<p>Indicator - Asset Renewal & Upgrade</p> <p><i>Measure - Asset renewal & Upgrade compared to depreciation</i></p> <p>Expected range in accordance with the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework - 40% to 130%</p> <p>Assessment of whether council assets are being renewed or upgraded as planned. It compares the rate of spending on existing assets through renewing, restoring, replacing or upgrading existing assets with depreciation. Ratios higher than 1.0 indicate there is a lesser risk of insufficient spending on Council's asset base.</p>	100.75%	44.54%

The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework provides "Expected ranges" for each indicator. The framework has been developed to consider results at the end of the financial year so some results during the year are outside the expected range due to the timing of receipts and payments.

Explanations are provided in Attachment 4 for those indicators that are outside the "expected ranges".

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6 STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at the centre through effective financial management; well measured risk management; and implementation of effective community engagement practices

- 6.1** Deliver responsible budget outcomes, linked to strategy, that deliver value, innovation, and rating fairness

Budget Implications

Council's financial performance is in line with expectations.

Policy/Relevant Law

Section 97 - Quarterly Budget Report of the Local Government Act 2020 states:

1. As soon as practicable after the end of each quarter of the financial year, the Chief Executive Officer must ensure that a quarterly budget report is presented to the Council at a Council meeting which is open to the public.
2. A quarterly budget report must include–
 - a. a comparison of the actual and budgeted results to date; and
 - b. an explanation of any material variations; and
 - c. any other matters prescribed by the regulations.
3. In addition, the second quarterly report of a financial year must include a statement by the Chief Executive Officer as to whether a revised budget is, or may be, required.

Sustainability Implications

There are no economic, social or environmental implications in relation to the item

Risk Assessment

Council is required to establish and maintain a budgeting and reporting framework that is consistent with the principles of sound management and this report assists Council in meeting that requirement.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Council's financial performance reports will continue to be published monthly.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

1. **The Comprehensive Income Statement, Balance Sheet, Statement of Cash Flows and Financial Performance Indicators for the period ended 31 December 2025 be received and adopted.**

ATTACHMENTS

Comprehensive Income Statement, Balance Sheet, Statement of Cash Flows and Financial Performance Indicators are provided as Attachment 3.10

SECTION 4 - INFORMATION REPORTS

4.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM - DECEMBER 2025 REPORT

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26449

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the December 2025 round of engagement sessions from the Council's Community Engagement Program 2025/26, and the progress on items raised by community to date.

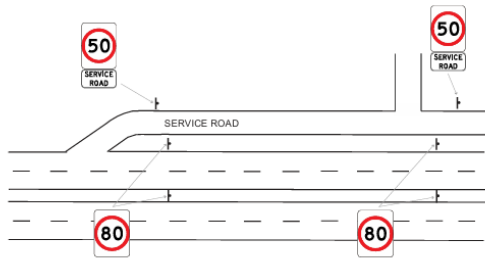
DISCUSSION

Council adopted the Community Engagement Program 2025/26 at the November 2025 Council Meeting. This Program outlined a schedule for engagement sessions to be held in December 2025, March and June 2026.

Council delivered the December 2025 round of engagements in Ararat, Buangor, Elmhurst, Lake Bolac, Mininera, Moyston, Pomonal, Willaura. The Ararat session was held at the library and the Lake Bolac and Mininera sessions were able to be scheduled to coincide with the community Christmas events in these locations. The Buangor session coincided with the last session of the cricket season, however the end of season celebrations ended up elsewhere. Moyston and Pomonal sessions were held at the General Stores, and the Willaura session was held next to the bakery. A total of 46 people were engaged across the 8 engagement sessions. A summary of the issues raised and the actions taken to date are provided below.

Table 1. Summary of issues raised and progress as at 15 January 2026.

#	Issues Raised	Progress as at 15 Jan 2026
	Ararat	
1	A person had great concerns for the safety of children being dropped off at a bus stop on View Point Street between Taylor Street and Banksia Street on the eastern side of the road, across from the intersection with Tobin Street. They observed that all of the children will cross Banksia Street travel south along View Point Street. They thought the bus stop should be moved further south to a safer location further south along View Point St towards Temple St.	This is in relation to a school bus stop. According to the Dept. Of Transport and Planning and Dept. Education, school bus variation requests are to be directed to the coordinating principal in the first instance, which would be the Principal at the Ararat Community College. A letter from Council has been sent to the Ararat College to refer the matter to them, and Council staff will follow up with the College when school resumes. The person who raised the issue has been kept informed.
	Buangor	
2	Issues that had been previously raised at the Buangor Community Asset Committee (CAC) were discussed. These issues will continue to be addressed through the Buangor CAC processes. Another issue raised was the cracks on the tennis courts and if these could be fixed.	Maintenance request lodged to inspect and seal the cracks in the Buangor tennis courts.
	Elmhurst	

3	The local community were very keen to see their local pub reopen, this was their top priority for the town. The business owners were present and discussed their progress.	Council staff are liaising with the business owners to navigate and meet the regulatory requirements.
4	The community wanted to say that the Council staff member who does the mowing in town does a great job.	The positive feedback has been noted and passed on to the staff member.
	Asked whether Council could mow the grass at the church as well, because the church no longer has someone to mow.	This request has been carefully considered. Council is unable to mow lawns for third parties, even churches. This is the responsibility of the property owner (or tenant or property manager, if applicable). The Chair of the Elmhurst Community Development Group has been informed of this outcome via phone.
	Community members raised concerns about sight distance and road safety Landsborough-Elmhurst Road, from the intersection with Pyrenees Highway to the end of the 'dog-leg' shape. They also asked if road safety can be improved at the intersection of the Pyrenees Highway and Landsborough-Elmhurst Road with an overtaking lane, turning lane, or similar. There is a rail crossing on Landsborough-Elmhurst Road approx. 20m from the Pyrenees Highway. When the rail crossing is closed for a train, there may be multiple vehicles and trucks waiting on the Pyrenees Highway, which could become a safety hazard.	Feedback regarding the road design and safety on Landsborough-Elmhurst Road, from the intersection with Pyrenees Highway to the end of the 'dog-leg' shape, has been passed onto the Council engineering team. The community's concerns regarding the Pyrenees Highway section of this intersection were also lodged with VicRoads 30 December 2025 via the online form below: https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/traffic-and-road-use/report-a-road-issue
	Residents queried if the speed limit at the railway crossings on Pyrenees Highway can be changed from 60km/hr to 80km/hr.	This query was lodged with VicRoads on 30 December 2025 via the online form below: https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/traffic-and-road-use/report-a-road-issue
	Residents also asked if the speed limit through the town can be changed from 80km/hr to 60km/hr	The Dept. Transport and Planning's Speed Zoning Policy and Speed Zoning Technical Guidelines were reviewed. The 80km/hr speed limit on the Pyrenees Highway through the township is consistent with the Policy and Guidelines, see image captured below from page 20 of the Guidelines:  <i>Figure 4: Service road with signposted speed limit</i> The Chair of the Elmhurst Community Development Group has been advised on this finding via phone.
	There are some dirt roads where the grading has created mounds of dirt on the roadsides, which prevents access for their grass slashers and they become overgrown.	Feedback has been lodged that mounds of dirt on roadsides is preventing the ability for locals to slash overgrown grass. An email will be sent to the Chair of the Elmhurst Community Development

		Group to pass on to the community to ask that they submit a Snap Send Solve to notify us of specific locations of the mounds.
	Several outer roads are in need of roadside slashing, Boundary Road was mentioned specifically.	A request has been lodged to slash the roadsides on Boundary Road, and to inspect the other roadsides for slashing. Residents of Elmhurst will be asked to send a Snap Send Solve request roadside slashing is needed on other roads.
	Can the dust on some of the dirt roads be suppressed, possibly using Otta seals? The roads that were mentioned for dust suppression in the meeting included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From the Bush Nursing Centre to the railway tracks From the police station to McKay St The road to the power substation (Pyrenees Shire road) 	OTTA seal of the first two sections will be considered as part of the Council's budget development process. The request for dust suppression on the roads to the power substation (Wiltshires Lane and Easter Brooks Lane) have been passed to the Pyrenees Shire Council.
	Attendees were disappointed the 2026 bin calendars did not have magnets. Attendees discussed a solution of simply sticking the 2026 calendars onto the 2025 calendar. The community asked if the bin calendars for 2027 can have magnets on the back.	This feedback and suggestion has been lodged.
	Can all bins be collected on the same day? The green bin is collected on a different day to the other bins.	This feedback and suggestion has been lodged.
	Residents asked about the possibility of a hard rubbish collection for large items and metals.	Based on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report to Parliament 'Council Waste Management Services' (December 2021) ¹ , in 2019/20, 43 out of 79 Victorian councils provided a kerbside hard waste collection service, and 31 of these were metropolitan councils. These 43 councils spent a total of approx. \$39.6 million on this service, or close to \$930,000 per council. If Ararat Rural City Council were to introduce this service based on the average 2019/20 cost per council, and without factoring in additional costs for the larger geographical distances for rural areas, Council would need to increase its 2025/26 waste charges by at least 37%. This increase is too high to impose onto ratepayers. It is therefore not financially viable to offer a kerbside hard rubbish collection service for Ararat Rural City. A hard rubbish skip option has also been considered, but this would also require a ramp to be available to assist people to drop large, bulky items into the skip. There is currently no suitable site in Elmhurst that Council is aware of that is suitable for this purpose.
	There is a very large pine tree that has fallen over on the edge of town to the west, can this be removed?	Tree is located on the Pyrenees Highway in the 80km/hour zone, which is a VicRoads managed road. The fallen tree has been reported to VicRoads via their online form:

¹ [Council Waste Management Services](#)

		https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/traffic-and-road-use/report-a-road-issue
	Managing waste from the Elmhurst Cemetery and several options were discussed during the drop in session.	No further action required.
	The quality of the tap water was discussed, some locals have noticed an occasional odour in the water.	Attendees were advised to contact GWMWater if they detect odour in their water supply again.
	Timing of the fire prevention inspections was discussed and a query was asked on whether the inspections had already occurred.	The prevention inspections had already occurred and notices were issued in mid-December 2025.
	Concerns were raised about the state of the former Elmhurst Primary School and it being underutilised land.	No further action by Council. Concerns were noted, community members were aware that this was State Government owned land.
	Query was asked about how many water tankers does Council have available to assist in the event of a bushfire.	Council has 1 water tanker that is used for road maintenance and other infrastructure works.
	One local resident stopped receiving all mail from Council, including bin calendars, rates notice, etc.	Rates department have spoken to the resident on 31 December 2025 and confirmed their postal address details. The resident was not receiving any of their mail from other entities as well and will be following up with the Post Office
	Concerns about cars being left on the roadside for long periods in a specific location in Elmhurst.	Location was visited after the Drop In Session on the 17 th December 2025, all vehicles in the area appeared to be within private property boundaries. Community will be asked to report any other abandoned vehicles via Snap Send Solve
	Lake Bolac	
	The management of rabbits was raised by multiple people.	Council officers will investigate potential options to use the Roadside Weeds and Pests grant funding or other mechanisms to help better manage the rabbit pest problem.
	There were several queries regarding roads that were managed by VicRoads/Dept. Transport and Planning.	No further action required by Council
	Fire prevention inspections and notices were discussed	No further action required by Council
	People asked about the McCrows Road Bridge Upgrade, it was reiterated that the bridge upgrade would not commence until after harvest.	No further action required by Council. Notification of works and detours will be released in the lead up to the commencement of construction.
	Mininera	
	An upgrade of the lighting at the oval was requested	A grant application for this project will be submitted for funding to the current round of Sport and Recreation Victoria's Country Football Netball Program.
	The Mininera Recreation Reserve may seek another water tank in the future to help them maintain their oval green.	Noted. No further action required by Council until further notice.
	Moyston	
	There was general confusion about the change of speed limit on Ararat-Halls Gap Road from 100km/hr to 80km/hr. Comments included: why did the change occurred; concerns around the lack of consultation and signage about the changed speed limit, and the lack of speed limit	Council attendees reiterated that Council was notified at the same time as the general public about the speed change to 80km/hour. The road is a VicRoads road, attendees were advised to provide their feedback directly to VicRoads.

	signage on the roadside between Ararat and Moyston.	
	Council was thanked for opening the Moyston Transfer Station in late October/early November 2025.	The feedback was received and appreciated.
	Road safety outside the Moyston Primary School was raised as a serious concern, especially when detours are in place on the Western Highway that direct traffic through Moyston. Cars are seen driving through at above 40km/hr. Flashing signs were suggested to raise awareness of the school zone and speed limit during school hours.	Ararat-Halls Gap Road is an arterial road managed by the Department of Transport and Planning. Council will advocate to the Department of Transport to install flashing signs at Moyston Primary School on the arterial road. Council also currently has a TAC Local Government Grant submitted to prepare concept designs for road safety infrastructure treatments in Moyston from the School to the General Store and part of Brooke St. Outcomes are expected in early 2026.
	Road safety at the intersection of Moyston-Great Western Road and Ararat-Halls Gap Road was raised. B-Double trucks often cut across the intersection.	Feedback about this intersection has been passed to the Council's engineering team.
	On Moyston-Great Western Road, there is a section of road where the trees block the view of the road ahead. Could the trees be cut back or cut higher for further sight distance.	Request has been submitted to see if overhanging branches can be trimmed higher.
	Concerns were raised about the safety of the intersection of Morocco Hill Road and Ararat Halls Gap Road, with the first section of Morocco Hill Road being a ramp up to a crest.	Suggestion to close part of Morocco Hill Road has been sent to the engineering team.
	An approx. 200 metre section of Morocco Hill Road was resheeted with a gravel/rock mix and has since been very dusty. Could this section be Otta sealed to suppress the dust?	OTTA seal of this section will be considered as part of the Council's budget development process.
	The locals like to go for walks from the Recreation Reserve, along Ararat-Halls Gap Road, Adelaide Hills Road, Morocco Hill Road, then Moyston-Great Western Road back to the Recreation Reserve. Some also like to continue along Adelaide Hills Road up to Rocky Point Road before heading back down on Moyston-Great Western Road. The roadside vegetation has become quite overgrown in places, leaving walkers with little room when a car drives past. Can these roadsides be tidied up?	Request has been submitted to tidy up the roadsides mentioned during the Drop In Session. Community members are encouraged to report overgrown roadsides via the Snap Send Solve app.
	Pest management of rabbits was discussed. The community wanted to learn more about what treatments were being used and in which locations.	To be followed up when staff return from leave.
	During the engagement session, multiple trucks passed the Moyston General Store on Brook Street. Was there a traffic counter on this street and if so, what is the number of cars and trucks that use this road?	We do not have recent traffic counts on this road available. New traffic counters will be purchased and installed, but it is unlikely to be installed before the end of the current harvest season.
	Pomonal	
	Suggestions for how the Council Drop In Session could be better promoted in Pomonal	The community member was thanked for their feedback, it was acknowledged that

were shared, including putting a poster in the General Store's community notice board, putting the events in the Pomonal community newsletter and making sure it's on Nadya's blackboard in the lead up to the event.	communication is always a challenge and we will endeavour to improve the promotion of future sessions.
The change of speed limit between Ararat and Moyston was discussed. Similar to Moyston, there was confusion about what the current speed limit was, and why the limit was changed.	Council attendees reiterated that Council was notified at the same time as the general public about the speed change to 80km/hour. The road is a VicRoads road, attendees were advised to provide their feedback directly to VicRoads.
Road safety outside the Pomonal Primary School was raised. Cars have been observed overtaking other cars that have slowed to 40km/hr in the school zone. Flashing signs were suggested, or whether it was possible to build a school pick up location somewhere off Ararat-Halls Gap Road.	Ararat-Halls Gap Road is an arterial road managed by the Department of Transport and Planning. Council will advocate to the Department of Transport to install flashing signs at Pomonal Primary School on the arterial road. Building an alternative school pick up location has significant challenges because there are no other existing roads next to the school, and limited space within the school to build a new pickup area.
People asked for the Pomonal Transfer Station to be reopened. The Halls Gap Transfer Station staff have been unfriendly and unwelcoming towards Pomonal residents. The option of requesting a second kerbside bin was discussed, as well as going to the Moyston Transfer Station.	This feedback and request will be considered when the review of the Moyston and Elmhurst transfer station openings are reviewed at the end of this financial year.
There was a query about the status of the planning permit application for a new tourism development in Pomonal.	The planning permit application and status is available on the Greenlight and can be found by searching the Public Planning Register.
A person had a planning related query regarding their private property.	Council planning department will liaise directly with the community member about their query.
Willaura	
Can the line marking paint be refreshed at the intersection of Pyrenees Highway, Moyston-Willaura Road, Yarram Gap Road and Warranooke St?	Request has been submitted to repaint the lines.
Can a dirt patches outside the Willaura Bakery, which used to have plants in them in the footpath, be patched up or filled in with asphalt and made the same as the surrounding path?	Request has been submitted to patch the footpath.
The drainage in the laneway needs a tidy up.	Request has been submitted to clear the drain
Request for a new community notice board near the park bench next to the supermarket.	Request to investigate and install a new community notice board has been lodged.
One person wanted to learn more about how their rates were used to fund roads, paths, kerb & channel, community infrastructure and services. This was discussed on the day.	No further action required.

Improvements for Future Engagement Rounds

The Lake Bolac engagement session was held at the Lake Bolac Hotel. This was a good venue in terms of being able to engage with a larger number of people, however the evening became a busy night for trade and Council did not wish to occupy a table that could be available for patrons. Councillors and council staff moved to outside of the Lake Bolac Hotel to engage with community, but some community members attended the Hotel and were unable to locate the Council Drop In Session. In future rounds of

engagements where a hospitality venue is used, Council will aim to make the locations outside or close by, or book the sessions during quieter periods for the venue to reduce the likelihood of having a potentially negative impact on trade. Future sessions will also aim to have clearer signage so people can locate us if the area is crowded.

Contact details for attendees were not obtained unless they had a specific query that required follow up. In hindsight, this meant that responses to a number of general queries were not able to be given back to the attendees directly. A sign-in sheet requesting contact details for attendees who wish to receive updates will be available at future sessions.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.3** Continuously improve Council's community engagement process and practices in line with deliberative engagement practices, while ensuring that Councillors' roles as elected community representatives are understood and reflected in decision-making.

Budget Implications

The Community Engagement Program 2025/2026 does not have any budget implications. This Program will be delivered within the existing resources and budget. The issues arising from the engagement sessions may have budget implications, these will be assessed on a case by case basis and may be considered for future budgets.

Policy/Relevant Law

Ararat Rural City Council's Community Engagement Policy

Sustainability Implications

The community engagement sessions will aim to coincide with other community events and activities, or locate the sessions in places where people may wish to visit. This is in recognition of the value of people's time and travel costs, and enables community members to achieve multiple activities in the one journey.

Risk Assessment

The attached Community Engagement Program 2025/26 includes a risk analysis and mitigation measures. This is a low risk Program.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

This Program supports stakeholder collaboration and community engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- Council receives the Community Engagement Program - December 2025 Report**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item.

4.2 PRESTIGE MILL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT - DECEMBER 2025 UPDATE

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26450

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Housing Support Program – Community Enabling Infrastructure Stream (HSP-CEIS) funded project at 87 Queen St, also known as the former Prestige Mill site. To align this report to a more locally recognisable project name, this monthly report will be referred to as the 'Prestige Mill Infrastructure Project' update.

The subdivision plan has been drafted and the design work for the civil and utility infrastructure, such as roads, paths, water mains, sewer, power, NBN connections, etc, are underway.

DISCUSSION

Recap

The HSP-CEIS grant helps to resolve the barriers that have previously prevented this site from being financially viable to develop into assets that could provide better value for the community, such as housing. The grant unlocks the site by funding the cost of enabling infrastructure for 90 new dwellings, including planning, detailed designs, construction costs for roads, footpaths, kerb & channel, drainage, as well as costs for utility infrastructure such as power, water, sewerage, and NBN. The grant does not fund the cost to build the homes, however with the major barriers removed, private investment into housing will become viable.

Progress to Date

A diagram of the draft subdivision plan is shown below. Residential lot sizes will average around 300-400m², providing a wide range of housing options to meet diverse community needs. This has been provided on the Council's Engage Ararat website and in local print newspapers in December 2025:



Example of a vehicle turning movement in the proposed new roads:



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. GROWING OUR PLACE

1.2 Support innovative housing models that work to overcome market failure and create the capacity to increase the population of Ararat Rural City.

This project is funded by a \$7.3 million grant from the Federal Government's Housing Support Program: Community Enabling Infrastructure Fund.

Not applicable

Not applicable

Risk Assessment

Demolition works are progressing in line with risk assessment and mitigation measures, ensuring that all identified hazards are being effectively managed and safety protocols are strictly followed.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Council officers have liaised closely with the site owners on this project. Opportunities for community engagement are anticipated as planning for the project progresses.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Council receives the Prestige Mill Infrastructure Project - December 2025 Update report.**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item

4.3 ANNUAL PLAN 2025/26 UPDATE (DECEMBER 2025)

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26451

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council Plan 2025-29 contains 53 actions to be undertaken during the 2025/2026 (Year 1) financial year under the strategic objectives:

1. Growing our place
2. Building robust local economies
3. Preserving the environment
4. Developing and maintaining key enabling infrastructure
5. Enhancing community life; and
6. Strong and effective governance

These actions are provided in the Annual Plan 2025/26 and their progress is reported monthly at Council Meetings.

DISCUSSION

The Annual Plan 2025/26 contains 53 actions. Progress on these actions are summarised below, with the change from the previous monthly report shown in brackets.

Status	Number of Actions
Completed	10 (+3)
In progress 51-99%	14 (+11)
In progress 0-50%	17 (-13)
Not Started	1 (-1)
Ongoing	11

Further details on each action is provided in the table below.

Council Plan Objectives	Actions	Progress	Officer Comment
1.1 Develop a strategic land use planning framework with annual targets to support sustainable urban growth.	1.1.1 Complete a review of Council's Planning Scheme as required under Section 12B of the Planning Environment Act 1987	In progress 0-50%	Council officers are working with the Department of Transport and Planning's Regional Planning Hub on the Ararat Planning Scheme review.
	1.1.2 Establish annual targets for sustainable urban growth	In progress 0-50%	This action is closely linked to action 1.1.1 and will occur concurrently.
	1.1.3 Complete the 'Unlocking Ararat North East' Structure Plan project	In progress 51-99%	The first draft of the structure plan has been presented to GWMWater and PowerCor for feedback, an revised draft is in progress.
1.2 Support innovative housing models that work to overcome market	1.2.1 Deliver enabling infrastructure for well-located homes that	In progress 0-50%	Pre-construction planning and design for the enabling infrastructure is underway, and demolition and site

failure and create the capacity to increase the population of Ararat Rural City.	address critical housing gaps in central Ararat, with support from the Housing Support Program: Community Enabling Infrastructure Stream.		clearing is progressing. See 'Housing Support Program Project Update' report for further details.
	1.2.2 Continue to develop the Ararat Housing Enterprise P/L, delivering another four houses in Ararat during 2025/2026.	In progress 0-50%	Two homes are nearing completion of construction. Another two homes are due to commence construction, and pre-construction planning for another two homes is underway.
	1.2.3 Work with developers to submit EOI application/s to the National Housing Infrastructure Facility Crisis and Transitional Housing (NHIF CT) program	Complete	The EOI application has been submitted. This action is marked complete, however if the EOI is successful, a full application will be submitted and further updates will be provided.
1.3 Work with other levels of government, business, educational institutions and not-for-for profits to develop programs to increase in-migration to Ararat Rural City to grow our population.	1.3.1 Complete the Jack and Jill Kindergarten Refurbishment, with support from the Building Blocks Improvement Grant	In progress 0-50%	Refurbishment works will commence in the April school holidays. Council is working closely with Y Kinders to minimise disruptions to families as much as possible during the works.
	1.3.2 Establish a new childcare centre in Lake Bolac	In progress 0-50%	Council officers are continuing to liaise with potential childcare providers to deliver this project
	1.3.3 Deliver the CALD Outreach Initiative	In progress 51-99%	The CALD Outreach Officer is continuing to actively engage families and working closely with the kindergartens and childcare centres to support access to early childhood education. This project is a multi-year initiative, and it is now over half way complete for the 2025/26 year
2.1 Partner with Federation University Australia to deliver the Ararat Jobs and Technology Precinct with a focus on engaging with local agribusiness, industry and community.	2.1.1 Build stronger connections between AJTP and local industry, including promotion of industry internships for research students.	Ongoing	The AJTP Advisory Group and the Future of the Regions group are focused on industry and stakeholder engagement. As PhD students commence their research projects the level of industry engagement is increasing.
	2.1.2 Work with Federation University, community and industry stakeholders to apply for a grant for National Science Week in August 2026	Complete	The application has been submitted for a project titled 'Celebrating Science in Rural Communities'. Outcomes are expected in March 2026 and further engagement with stakeholders will occur afterwards if funding is awarded.
	2.1.3 Continue to support the delivery of TAFE courses at the Ararat Jobs and Technology Precinct	Ongoing	Cert 3 in Early Childhood Education and Care courses are continuing at the Precinct. The Ararat Best Start Workshop Series, supported by a Dept. Education Innovation Grant, will continue in 2026.
2.2 Work with other levels of government, local business, and private investors to develop a business park within Ararat Rural City, focused on agricultural value adding and advanced manufacturing,	2.2.1 Work with Invest Victoria, Regional Development Victoria and private sector partners to develop plans for the ARCC Circular Economy Precinct.	Ongoing	Council is working with Invest Victoria, Regional Development Victoria and a number of private sector partners to make a case for a state significant circular economy hub in Ararat
	2.2.2 Continue to support Valorify P/L to develop a	Ongoing	Council continues to strongly support Valorify P/L.

potentially leveraging "behind the meter" power.	biogas plant in Ararat which uses straw as the major input.		
	2.2.3 Seek funding from the Victorian Government's \$10 million fund to unlock industrial trunk infrastructure to accelerate new industrial developments	In progress 0-50%	Regional Development Victoria and the Department of Transport and Planning have been engaged on our industrial trunk infrastructure needs.
2.3 Engage with Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism and local businesses to improve the quality of experience and drive growth in high yield tourist outcomes.	2.3.1 Deliver the Ararat Hills Outdoor Adventure Precinct Feasibility Study	In progress 0-50%	The establishment of the Project Control Group is underway.
	2.3.2 Partner with local hospitality, accommodation, food and wine industry to develop an annual fine wine and food event within the municipality.	In progress 0-50%	The Economic Development team is continuing to liaise closely with the local industry to identify potential opportunities for an annual fine wine and food event.
	2.3.3 Work with operators and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism to deliver 4 star and above accommodation	In progress 0-50%	Council is supporting the development of a range of accommodation businesses in the municipality.
3.1 Position Ararat Rural City Council as a prime mover in driving circular economy policy in waste management, including local processing and management of recyclables, and in use of renewable energy for Council purposes.	3.1.1 Develop and adopt an ambitious business based on key partnerships and production of higher value outputs, that views municipal "waste" as an economic resource.	In progress 0-50%	Investigation and development of other opportunities to produce higher value outputs from municipal waste is underway.
	3.1.2 Continue to support PlastOil to develop a plastics recycling facility in Ararat	Ongoing	Council continues to strongly support PlastOil through the Economic Development team.
3.2 Develop innovative energy solutions utilising locally produced waste	3.2.1 Continue to support Valorify P/L to develop a biogas plant in Ararat which uses straw as the major input.	Ongoing	Council continues to strongly support Valorify P/L.
	3.2.2 Work with Federal and State Government and private sector partners to plan, fund and develop a circular economy industrial precinct.	In progress 0-50%	Council is working with Invest Victoria, Regional Development Victoria and a number of private sector partners to make a case for a state significant circular economy hub in Ararat.
	3.2.3 Continue to advocate for greater policy confidence and support for renewable gas generation	Ongoing	Council is continuing to engage with State and Federal governments to advocate for stronger support for renewable gas generation.
3.3 Partner with local organisations and scientific experts to implement the Environment Strategy 2024-34, with a focus on circular economy, emissions reduction and sustainable management of Council assets.	3.3.1 Deliver the Pomonal Community Hall Battery Project with the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance and with support from the 100 Neighbourhood Batteries Grants Program	In progress 0-50%	Indigo Power has been announced as the successful tenderer to deliver the Powering Resilience in the Regions battery project for Pomonal, following a collaborative tender process with the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance and 10 partner councils.
	3.3.2 Deliver the Roadside Weeds and Pests Program	In progress 51-99%	The tender for Roadside Weeds and Pest Program has been awarded and works are underway.

	3.3.3 Explore a model for collaborating with community asset committees to use rooftop solar to increase use of renewable energy at community facilities.	Complete	The application to the Community Energy Upgrades Fund Round 2 was unsuccessful. Council will continue to liaise with interested community asset committees to explore rooftop solar and renewable energy options at community facilities.
4.1 Ensure that asset development and renewal during the planning period matches that identified in Council's Asset Plan 2025-2035.	4.1.1 Develop the Asset Plan 2025-35	Complete	The Asset Plan 2025-35 was adopted at the October 2025 Council Meeting
	4.1.2 Continue to advocate for the Western Highway Upgrade from Buangor to Ararat	Ongoing	Advocacy efforts are ongoing with the Western Highway Action Committee (WHAC)
	4.1.3 Continue to advocate for a North South Heavy Vehicle Route	Ongoing	This initiative is included in the Advocacy Program 2025 and will be discussed with key stakeholders at the next available opportunity.
4.2 Work directly with asset users to manage and develop new and existing assets.	4.2.1 Progress plans and costings for a new indoor sports facility and the outdoor pool upgrade	In progress 0-50%	The Gender Impact Assessments identified a number of improvements, these are in the process of being incorporated into the plans.
	4.2.2 Deliver the Community Road Safety Strategy	In progress 51-99%	Contractor was engaged and community consultation undertaken in 2024/25. Preparation of the final draft Strategy is in progress.
	4.2.3 Deliver the Ararat Rural City Sport and Active Recreation Strategy	In progress 51-99%	Contractor was engaged and community consultation undertaken in 2024/25. Preparation of the final draft Strategy is in progress.
4.3 Deliver infrastructure outcomes that support economic growth, are mindful of intergenerational equity and enhance community wellbeing and safety. These approaches will explore strategic use of debt to fund long-term assets and ensure Council's financial sustainability.	4.3.1 Deliver the 2025/26 Capital Works Program	In progress 0-50%	Refer to the Capital Works report.
5.1 Open up Council's arts and culture assets to greater community participation, ownership and engagement in decision-making	5.1.1 Deliver artist and community group exhibits in the Barkly St Laneway and Community Wall within the Ararat Gallery TAMA	In progress 51-99%	The first artworks from the EOI process have been installed on the Community Wall (Christine Baines) and Laneway (Anne-Marie Randall). Planning for the rest of the community exhibition program for this financial year is nearing completion.
	5.1.2 Increase participation in programs at Ararat Gallery TAMA	In progress 51-99%	The Gallery hosted an excursion by Ararat West Primary School that complemented a unit the students completed called 'How is it Made?', which included how different fibres are used to create different products, such as the different textile artworks on exhibition at the Gallery. Artist talks were held in December, and planning for the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) Kids on Tour was finalised to provide free school

			holiday art activities for kids at the Gallery in January.
	5.1.3 Investigate ways to maximise scheduling of community events at the Town Hall	Complete	The Town Hall has reviewed its previous bookings and schedules, and has identified that the number of events has been increasing each year, with a strong level of community usage. Auditorium utilisation has increased from 105 bookings in 2023/24, to 153 bookings in 2024/25. For 2025/26, the Town Hall has already delivered 91 bookings as at 31 December 2025. There is still scope for community to book parts of the Town Hall, such as the foyer for smaller community gatherings. Community are encouraged to reach out to the Town Hall as early as possible to secure their bookings.
	5.1.4 Identify innovative ways to increase the promotion and reach of performances at the Town Hall	Complete	A staffing and structural update has occurred within the Arts Precinct to better integrate our arts, culture, visitor services and venue operations, as well as increase the promotion, reach and participation in events and programs. This includes the appointment of two part time Administration & Marketing Officers, following the retirement of the Town Hall's Admin Coordinator.
5.2 Develop models of volunteering that recognise, support and properly utilise the skills that community volunteers bring to community life.	5.2.1 Deliver the first of three years of the Youth Events, Activities and Happenings (YEAH) Crew	In progress 51-99%	The YEAH Crew have had great 2025, and they have co-designed an even bigger program for 2026.
	5.2.2 Deliver young people's programs across schools, largely through the Crazy Ideas College	In progress 51-99%	The Ararat Youth Activators introduced two new experiences for students in 2025, called 'First Jobs Matter' and 'Future of Ararat', in addition to their existing programs 'Social Innovators', 'Ideas2Life', and other program.
	5.2.3 Work with community groups to deliver an annual Volunteer Expo	In progress 0-50%	Planning for the National Volunteer Week celebrations has commenced. The feedback from the previous Ararat Volunteer Expos indicated that an annual Expo may not be the most effective way to help people who wish to volunteer to connect with organisations that are looking for volunteers. Potential alternative options are being investigated and considered.
	5.2.4 Promote the benefits and achievements of volunteers, to encourage participation	Ongoing	Applications to join Council's volunteer team have opened. The application form and Frequently Asked Questions are available via Engage Ararat.
5.3 Partner with community groups, not-for-profits, and Traditional Owner organisations to develop Ararat Rural City into a	5.3.1 Develop the Disability Action Plan	In progress 0-50%	The Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the Working Group closed on 19 December 2025 and invitations to the Working Group meetings were sent on 5 th January 2026. The first meeting will be held on 21 January 2026.

more inclusive, welcoming, tolerant and diverse community.	5.3.2 Develop the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29	Complete	The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29 was adopted at the October 2025 Council Meeting.
	5.3.3 Hold quarterly meetings of the Child Friendly Cities and Communities Working Group	In progress 51-99%	A final quarterly meeting of the 2025 CFCC Working Group was held on 3rd December 2025. The EOI for the 2026 CFCC Working Group opened and will close on 14 February 2026.
	5.3.4 Deliver multicultural events	In progress 51-99%	Council partnered with the Grampians/ Gariwerd Rural Australians for Refugees, Ararat Neighbourhood House, and many other community organisations and groups to deliver the Ararat Cultural Showcase Lunch at Alexandra Oval Community Centre on 6 December 2025. The event was very successful. Plans are being developed for another potential event in 2025/26.
6.1 Deliver responsible budget outcomes linked to strategy, that deliver value, innovation and rating fairness.	6.1.1 Deliver operational efficiencies to reduce avoidable overtime and improvements in casual staff rostering	In progress 51-99%	Some efficiencies in casual staffing arrangements have been identified and implemented. Further efficiencies will continue to be found.
	6.1.2 Undertake a review of Council's insurance coverage and policies to ensure they continue to provide value for money	Complete	Multiple meetings have been held with insurance representatives and all opportunities for cost efficiencies have been found and implemented.
6.2 Ensure appropriate risk management is applied to Council and organisational decisions. Council's internal function is applied to areas of perceived risk.	6.2.1 Deliver organisational efficiencies and improvements through IT infrastructure and systems upgrades	In progress 51-99%	IT infrastructure and systems upgrades are underway
	6.2.2 Undertake the Strategic Internal Audit Program – 5 years.	In progress 51-99%	Progress is being made on the items in the Strategic Internal Audit Program.
	6.2.3 Develop the 2026-2030 Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)	Not Started	Council officers are finalising reporting on the 2021-2025 GEAP before commencing the development of the 2026-30 GEAP in early 2026.
	6.2.4 Ensure appropriate analysis of all inquiry and investigation reports relevant to Council operations are examined and recommendations implemented.	Ongoing	Each external enquiry and investigation undertaken in the local government sector is examined and appropriate actions undertaken. Significant issues and remedies are reported to the audit and risk committee.
6.3 Continuously improve Council's community engagement process and practices in line with deliberative engagement practices, while ensuring that Councillors' roles as elected community representatives are understood and reflected in decision-making.	6.3.1 Deliver a new Customer Request Management System (CRMS) integrated with the Snap Send Solve app	Complete	The new CRMS and integration with the Snap Send Solve app is now complete. Council officers will continue to encourage residents to install the app and report issues.
	6.3.2 Develop a regular biannual program of face-to-face community engagement opportunities	Complete	A quarterly program is presented. Refer to the Community Engagement Program 2025/26 Council Report.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

The Annual Plan 2025/26 aligns with all strategic objectives of the Council Plan 2025-29

Budget Implications

The Annual Plan 2025/2026 does not have any additional budget implications. All actions in the Annual Plan have been budgeted in the 2025/2026 Budget or have no additional resourcing requirements.

Policy/Relevant Law

Section 90 of the Local Government Act 2020 requires that Council produces a Council Plan for a minimum of a four year period. The Annual Plan is a document related to operationalising the Council Plan.

Sustainability Implications

The Annual Plan provides specific actions that will be undertaken for the key theme 5. Preserving Our Environment.

Risk Assessment

Implementing the Annual Plan has some inherent risks around project and program delivery on time, at cost and at an acceptable quality. These risks are managed through careful budget monitoring, a focus on effective project management and appropriate stakeholder engagement. Council has a commitment to improved performance across all of these areas.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Stakeholders and community groups will be engaged during the development and delivery of the actions, where applicable.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Council receives the Annual Plan 2025/26 - December 2025 report**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item

4.4 2025/2026 CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM - DECEMBER 2025

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26452

OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has approved its 2025/2026 Capital Works Program as a fundamental component of the current budget. With a substantial capital works investment totalling \$12.437 million, the budget primarily targets infrastructure enhancements.

Key initiatives include:

- Year two of Mount William Road Construction - supported by Federal Government funding.
- Buangor Ben Nevis Road Construction - including replacement of bridge one at the Warrak end of the project.
- The covered sports arena at the Ararat Pony Club facilities.
- Urban Gravel to Seal Road Upgrades continuing to upgrade accessibility across urban areas.
- Maintenance of Footpaths, Drainage, and Kerb and Channel.

These projects underscore the Council's commitment to improving local infrastructure and fostering community development in the 2025/2026 fiscal year.

DISCUSSION

Council's 2025/2026 Capital Works Program continues our shift to reintroduction of larger road and bridge construction projects. The program's budget has substantial state and federal funding targeting road construction and safety initiatives.

The focus for 2025/2026 remains on renewing and updating Council assets, leveraging in-house capabilities, and supporting local employment and contractors, and the tender of works with the expectation of possible budget savings in a softening construction market.

Key areas include:

- Enhanced roads reseal program.
- Urban drainage improvements
- Footpath network upgrades
- Major urban road gravel to seal program
- Year two of Mt William Road Reconstruction
- Roads to Recovery funded projects (Webb Street & McCrows Road Bridge)
- Safe Local Roads and Street funding projects

Budget Status:

As of 31 December 2025, 20% of the budget is expended.

Mt William Road reconstruction is currently underway with stage one works completed and the road reopened for the harvest season. Stage two is expected to commence in early February 2026. Bridge reconstruction on Buangor Ben Nevis Road commenced on 12 January 2026.

The works on Webb Street funded through the Roads to Recovery Funding are nearing completion with sealing work due to be undertaken in the next few weeks.

	Budget	Committed/ Contracted	Expended	%	Notes
PROPERTY -CAPITAL					
Property Capital	\$911,000				
Funding Property Capital Co-Contribution Allocations	-\$765,388				
Remaining Budget	\$145,612	-	-		\$361,00 Council Co-Contribution added for Buangor Pavilion Redevelopment from approval at Council Meeting 29 July 2025.
Mininera Recreation Reserve Toilet Upgrade		\$164,810	\$4,010	111%	
Tatyoona Oval Upgrade			\$11,165		
Buangor - Septic Upgrade		\$201,000			
TOTAL PROPERTY CAPITAL		\$365,810	\$15,175	261%	
PLANT & EQUIPMENT					
Vehicle Purchases	\$240,000		\$204,131	85%	Replacement of 4 x Utilities and SUV
Major Plant Purchases	\$260,000				
Fixtures, Fittings & Furniture	\$100,000	\$19,682	\$15,990	15%	Town Hall Speaker Security Cameras - Ararat Skate Park & Ararat Fitness Centre
Book stock - Library Book Replacement	\$40,000		\$24,038	60%	
TOTAL PLANT & EQUIPMENT		\$19,682	\$244,159	41%	
INFRASTRUCTURE					
Works by others					
Woorndoo Streatham Road	\$683,000	-	-		Works for this road is being undertaken by Moyne Shire. The budget amount is Council's contribution.
Roads					
Gravel Road Sheeting, Widening Alternative Sealing	\$1,800,000	-	\$182,620 (over spend 24/25)	30%	\$1.982m of this budget expended in 2024/2025. Approved Council Meeting 29 July 2025. Works include OTTA seal of • Nott Road, Ararat (Pyrenees Hwy end) • Sugarloaf Road
Transferred from other Capital Works Line Items	\$1,500,000		\$276,431		
			\$459,051		
Total	\$3,300,000				

Reseal Program	\$1,000,000	-	-	100%	Linemarking undertaken in 24/25 payment not made in same financial year
Buangor Ben Nevis Road	\$1,000,000	308,862	\$41,882	4%	Bridge Strengthening awarded and to commence around April 2026.
Urban Road Gravel to Seal	\$1,000,000	-	\$44,205	5%	Works Allocated for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexandra Avenue (in conjunction with SLRSP Funding) Coral & McNeil Street Maude Street (in conjunction with Pony Club Project)
Road Reconstruction Program	\$2,324,000	-			
Buangor Ben Nevis Road Contribution	-\$500,000				
Mt William Road Contribution	-\$1,250,000				
Bike Network Contribution	-\$133,000				
Transferred to Gravel Road Sheeting, Widening & Alternative Sealing	-\$400,000				
Remaining Budget	\$41,000		\$31,771	75%	Churchill Avenue final payments for maintenance between completion and sealing.
Major Patching	\$100,000		\$61,911	61%	
Bridges	\$0	-	\$2,624		Transferred to Gravel Road Sheeting, Widening & Alternative Sealing
Footpath Renewal Program	\$400,000	\$112,026	\$94,313	51%	Concreting works has been completed at Gordon Street Oval to complete the apron around the building. Works will commence on High Street when the contractor receives the MOA from VicRoads.
Urban Drainage Works	\$750,000				
Transferred to Gravel Road Sheeting, Widening & Alternative Sealing	-\$400,000	-	\$22,198	6%	
Remaining Budget	\$350,000				
Kerb and Channel	\$0	-	\$95,917		Remaining funds transferred to Gravel Road Sheeting, Widening & Alternative Sealing
TOTAL INFRASTRUCTURE		\$112,026	\$853,872	9%	
TOTAL CAPITAL WORKS		\$497,518	\$1,113,206	9%	

FUNDED PROJECTS - PROPERTY CAPITAL

Current Funded Projects	Budget	Funding Amount	Council Contribution	Community Contribution	Previous Years Expenditure	Committed Expenditure (25/26)	Expended (25/26)	Overall Total	%	Notes
Former Cobb & Co Staging Stables (Disaster Recovery Heritage Program)	\$60,000	\$60,000	Nil		\$1,237		30,371	\$30,371	50%	Ararat Maintenance Plumbing has completed works on this project & and acquitted.
Ararat Pony Club - Covered Sports Area (Play our Way Program)	\$1,490,000	\$1,490,000	Nil		\$14,270	\$1,260,110	\$54,872	\$1,329,252	89%	The design and construction of the undercover arena has been awarded to MKM Constructions. Lighting installation has been awarded to Matt Peel Electrical - this includes the installation of 3-phase power.;
Centenary Park - Dog Park (Open Space for Everyone Program)	\$112,000	\$100,000	\$12,000		\$1,172	\$13,468	\$8,313	\$22,958	20%	Detailed design is being completed in-house and has been endorsed by the funding body. Procurement and works have commenced.
Buangor Sports Pavilion Redevelopment (Tiny Towns Program)	\$631,000	\$50,000	\$581,000 (\$220k Property Capital) (\$361k Property Reserve)		\$303	\$542,738	\$87,959	\$631,523	100%	Detailed design has been completed by the contractor, Hotondo Homes. The building permit has been submitted and is awaiting approval.
Jack and Jill Kindergarten Redevelopment (Building Blocks improvement grants program)	\$745,000	\$745,000			\$26,000	\$539,734	\$71,601	\$637,335	85%	Works for this project have been awarded to: Renovation Works - ISJ Building Painting Works - Grampians Painting and Decorating Flooring - Choices Ararat Switchboard Upgrade - CHS Electrical

Ararat City Tennis Sports Lighting Installation and accessibility upgrade (Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund)	\$700,000	\$560,000	\$120,000	\$20,000	NA		\$1920	-	<1%	New Grant Received July 2025. Detailed design drawings have been endorsed, and procurement is going to market at the end of January.
Gordon Street Cricket Nets Upgrade (Australian Cricket Infrastructure Grant)	\$39,985	\$15,000	\$24,985		NA	\$13,850	\$19,732	\$33,852	82%	Orders have been completed for synthetic carpet and concrete works have been completed.
Pomonal Hall Battery Project (Powering Resilience in the Regions Program)	\$148,760	\$141,407	\$7,353		NA		\$7,353	\$7,353	5%	Council have paid their contribution to the project. Indigo Power have been awarded this project - any further expenditure will be paid by CVGA.
Ararat Library Lighting and Exterior Upgrade. (Living Libraries Infrastructure Program 2024-25)	\$51,026	\$51,026			NA		\$45,196	\$45,196	88%	External Painting and lighting have been completed.

FUNDED PROJECTS - ROADS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Funded Projects	Budget	Funding Amount	Council Contribution	Previous Years Expenditure	Committed Expenditure (25/26)	Expended 25/26	Overall Total	%	Notes
Webb Street Reconstruction (Roads to Recovery 24/25)	\$400,000	\$400,000		\$13,822		\$36,331	\$50,153	12%	Works have been completed with sealing of the road expected in late January, early February.
Buangor Ben Nevis Road (Roads to Recovery 24/25 & 25/26)	\$3,143,000	\$1,643,000	\$500,000 (Roads Program 25/26) \$1,000,000 (ARCC Capital Works 25/26)	\$269,592	\$308,862	\$41,882	\$311,474	29%	Ecology and Vegetation works are currently being finalised for works to commence early in the new year. Bridge Strengthening works has been awarded and will commence around Easter 2026.
Buangor Ben Nevis Road (SILRP Funding 26/26)	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000							Council contribution of \$1,250,000 required in 26/27 Budget
Mt William Road (HSVPP Funding 24/25)	\$6,250,000	\$5,000,000	\$1,250,000 (Roads Program 25/26)	\$217,582		\$871,122	\$1,088,704	17%	Stage 1 of the works are complete with sealing finalised in December 25. Stage 2 will commence at the conclusion of harvest. All works must be complete by 30 June 2026.
Buangor Ben Nevis Road - Bridge 7001.14 Design and Construct (Roads to Recovery - 25/26)	\$1,300,000	\$1,300,000		\$68,723	\$877,148	\$244,772	\$1,190,643	91%	Contract No. 731 - Awarded July 2025 \$1.109m - Road and Bridge Pty Ltd \$100,000 allowance for Permits and Vegetation offsets. Works commenced onsite on 12 January 2026. Construction timeframe through until mid March 2026.

McCrows Road Bridge (Roads to Recovery - 24/25)	\$350,000	\$350,000		\$17,738		\$1,754	\$19,492	5%	Tenders have been readvertised due to error from previous tenderer - expected to be awarded at January Council Meeting.
Ararat Active Bike Network (Active Transport Fund)	\$399,000	\$266,000	\$133,000 (Roads Program 25/26)	\$13,525		\$8,627	\$22,152	5%	No tenders were received on original tender call - works to be broken down and individually quoted.
Banfield Street - School Crossing (Road Safety Program - School Safety Improvements 20-25)	\$19,009	\$19,009		\$8,244		\$4,369	\$12,613	66%	These works are complete.
Queen Street Housing Support Program (Housing Support Program - Community Enabling Infrastructure)	\$7,380,000	\$7,380,000		\$152,580		\$452,554	\$605,135	8%	Sub-division planning and associated reporting are still in progress before submission to Council. Demolition works are progressing.
SAFE LOCAL ROADS AND STREETS PROGRAM									
View Point, Tobin & Taylor St Intersections	\$224,000	\$224,000		\$581		\$9,257	\$9,838	4%	The detailed design for this project is complete, and lighting design is being finalised, with procurement commencing in February 2026. This project will be run in conjunction with the Footpath project for Taylor Street.
Ingor Street - Raised Crossing	\$110,000	\$110,000		\$600		\$12,783	\$13,383	12%	The detailed design for this project is complete, and procurement commencing in February 2026.
King Street - Raised Crossing	\$110,000	\$110,000		\$4,702		\$11,286	\$15,988	15%	Tenders have been received for this project and will be awarded in mid-January 2026.

View Point & High St Intersection	\$117,000	\$117,000		\$1,526		\$12,429	\$13,955	12%	Tenders have been received for this project and will be awarded in mid-January 2026.
Moore & Princes Street Intersection	\$131,000	\$131,000		\$145		\$5,543	\$5,688	4%	The detailed design for this project is complete, and procurement will commence in February 2026.
Vincent Street & Alexandra Avenue - Raised Crossing	\$321,000	\$321,000		\$239		\$10,915	\$11,154	3%	The detailed design for this project has been received; some alterations are being requested to make the works more amenable to the location. This project will be run in conjunction with the Gravel to Seal project for Alexandra Avenue.
Queen & Moore Street Roundabout	\$548,000	\$548,000		\$1,531		\$20,140	\$21,671	4%	The detailed design for this project is complete, and the lighting design is being finalised, with procurement commencing in February 2026.
SAFE SYSTEM PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM (23/24)									
Barkly Street Raised Crossing	\$312,232	\$312,232		\$398		\$3,125	\$105,214	34%	This project is awaiting final design approval from the department of transport for the works to commence.
High Street Raised Crossing					\$99,750	\$2,338			This project has been awarded to SHS Civil.
Albert Street Footpath (Flexible Local Transport Solutions Program 25/26)	\$85,000	\$42,500	\$42,500			\$2,044	\$2,044	2%	Improving Pedestrian Accessibility to the Ararat Retirement Village and Sports Precinct - New Grant received September 2025. These designs are ready for tendering.

FUNDED PROJECTS - MISCELLANEOUS

Current Funded Projects	Budget	Funding Amount	Council Contribution	Previous Years Expenditure	Committed Expenditure (25/26)	Expended (25/26)	Overall Total	%	Notes
Roadside Weeds and Pest Program 25/26 (Funding of the same name)	\$74,135	\$74,135		NA			-	0%	This project has been awarded to Project Platypus, and they have commenced spraying and rabbit control in October.
Sport & Active Recreation Strategy (Local Sports Infrastructure Funding 23/24)	\$55,000	\$40,000	\$15,000	\$12,452			\$12,452	23%	CommunityVibe is undertaking the works associated with this project. Community engagement has been undertaken, and draft reporting is underway.
Community Road Safety Action Plan (TAC Local Govt Funding)	\$49,540	\$49,540		\$437		\$582	\$1,019	2%	DWB Engineering is undertaking the works associated with this project. Community engagement has been completed and draft reporting is being compiled
Unlocking Ararat North East (Streamlining for Growth 22/23)	\$85,000	\$85,000		NA	\$13,888	\$34,827	\$48,715	57%	Beveridge Williams is undertaking the works for this project. They are working with our Planning Department and Strategic Project Lead to progress the outcomes of the funding.
Ararat City Tennis Sports Lighting Installation and accessibility upgrade - Participation Initiative. (Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund)	\$50,000	\$50,000		NA				0%	This grant was received in July 2025 and will run in conjunction with the infrastructure project for Sports Lighting and accessibility upgrades.

Lake Bolac Kindergarten Carpark (YMCA received funding for work)	\$80,339	\$80,339		\$61,358		\$12,5590	\$73,917	91%	Funding was received by the YMCA to undertake the carpark works at Lake Bolac Kindergarten. Council procured the contractor, and project managed the works with the funding amount being paid to Council on completion of the works. Work is now complete.
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KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

The key financial drivers align strongly with the thrust of the Council Plan 2025-2029, particularly the following:

4. DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING KEY ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE

We will ensure that we plan, fund and develop new infrastructure in ways that deliver strong public value. Existing infrastructure will be managed, renewed, and maintained to ensure that it continues to serve identified public needs.

- 4.1** Ensure that asset development and renewal during the planning period matches that identified in Council's Asset Plan 2025-2035.
- 4.2** Work directly with asset users to manage and develop new and existing assets.
- 4.3** Deliver infrastructure outcomes that support economic are mindful of intergenerational equity and enhance community wellbeing and safety. These approaches will explore strategic use of debt to fund long-term assets and ensure Council's financial sustainability.

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.1** Deliver responsible budget outcomes, linked to strategy, that deliver value, innovation, and rating fairness.

Budget Implications

The 2025/2026 Capital Works Program represents a significant element of Council's 2025/2026 Budget. In the current civil construction market, it is essential that Council manages capital works expenditure carefully to ensure budget outcomes are met.

Policy/Relevant Law

The 2025/2026 Capital Works Program complies with the program funded in the 2025/2026 Budget.

Sustainability Implications

There are no environmental sustainability implications. Council is mindful of considering new innovative approaches to improve its sustainability and environmental footprint as a part of the Capital Works program.

Risk Assessment

The 2025/2026 Capital Works Program was developed as a mitigation of the financial risks associated with market volatility currently being experienced in the civil and building construction sectors.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Development of the 2025/2026 Capital Works Program represented an agile response to market conditions. A capacity to rework strategy based on a changing environment is a critical element in developing an innovative organisation.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

The 2025/2026 Capital Works Program has been developed as an element of the 2025/2026 Budget. There was extensive community engagement undertaken prior to adoption.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. That Council receive the Capital Works Program - December 2025 report.**

ATTACHMENTS

There are no Attachments relating to this item

SECTION 5 - COMMITTEE MINUTES/REPORTS

5.1 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MEETING

AUTHOR'S TITLE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 26453

OFFICER'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on the 2 December 2025.

DISCUSSION

Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee meetings are provided to Council at the first available opportunity after clearance by the Audit and Risk Committee Chairperson. The report contains the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 2 December 2025

Council Committees	Councillor representative	Current meeting (as presented)	Next scheduled meeting/s
Audit and Risk Committee	Cr Bob Sanders	2 December 2025	03 March 2026
Audit and Risk Committee	Cr Peter Joyce	2 December 2025	03 March 2026

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

The report supports the strategic objective of the Council Plan 2025 - 2029:

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at their centre through effective financial management, well measured risk management, and implementation of effective community engagement practices

- 6.2** Ensure appropriate risk management is applied to Council and organisational decisions.
Council's internal function is applied to areas of perceived risk.

Budget Implications

No budget impact for the receiving of minutes.

Policy/Legal/Statutory

Section 53 of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that Council must establish an Audit and Risk Committee.

Section 6.1 of the *Audit and Risk Committee Charter* states that minutes of Committee meetings will be provided to Council at the first available opportunity after clearance by the Committee Chairperson following each Committee meeting.

Risk Assessment

Council needs to be aware of issues raised in the minutes.

Stakeholder Consultation and Communication

Audit and Risk Committee members.

Councillor representation on Council Committees.

Chief Executive Officer and relevant Council officers.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. the Audit and Risk Committee Meetings minutes of 02 December 2025 be received**

ATTACHMENTS

The Audit and Risk Committee minutes as listed above are provided as Attachment 5.1.

SECTION 6 - INFORMAL MEETINGS

6.1 COUNCIL BRIEFINGS

AUTHOR'S TITLE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: CEO'S OFFICE
REFERENCE: 13039074

OFFICER'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any conflict of interest.

No person involved in the preparation of this report has a conflict of interest requiring disclosure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Governance Rules state that if there is a meeting of Councillors that:

1. is scheduled or planned for the purpose of discussing the business of *Council* or briefing Councillors;
2. is attended by at least one member of Council staff; and
3. is not a *Council meeting*, *Delegated Committee* meeting or *Community Asset Committee* meeting, the *Chief Executive Officer* must ensure that a summary of the matters discussed at the meeting are:
 - a. tabled at the next convenient *Council meeting*; and
 - b. recorded in the minutes of that *Council meeting*.

DISCUSSION

As a requirement of the Governance Rules, a summary of matters discussed at the Council Briefings held since the last Council Meeting are presented to Council and will be recorded in the minutes.

INFORMAL MEETINGS
Council Briefing held on 20 January 2026

Matters discussed at the briefing:

- Annual Report 2024/25
- Possible new beneficial enterprise
- Football Club Seasonal User Agreements
- Road Naming Proposal – Sparrows Lane
- Road Naming Proposal – Withers Lane
- S6A – Instrument of Delegation under the Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Fraud and Corruption Control Plan and Policy
- Community Engagement Policy
- Complaints Handling Policy
- Audit & Risk Committee Charter
- Rail Freight Alliance Stance
- Budget Development and Engagement Plan
- December 2025 Community Engagement Sessions Report
- Monthly Performance Report – Prestige Mill Infrastructure Project Update – December 2025
- Monthly Plan – Council Plan – Annual Plan
- Monthly Performance Report – December 2025
- Capital Works Program – December 2025
- McCrows Road Bridge

- Building approvals
- Planning approvals under delegation

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment to Council Plan Strategic Objectives

The report supports the strategic objective of the Council Plan 2025-2029:

6. STRONG AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

We will work hard to build models of governance that place delivering public value at the centre through effective financial management; well measured risk management; and implementation of effective community engagement practices.

- 6.3** Continuously improve Council's community engagement process and practices in line with deliberative engagement practices, while ensuring that Councillors' roles as elected community representatives are understood and reflected in decision-making.

Financial

There are no financial impacts for the receiving of Informal Meetings of Councillors.

Policy/Relevant Law

Reporting of Informal Meetings is in line with the requirements of the Governance Rules.

Risk Assessment

Following the requirements of the Governance Rules will ensure that Council meets its legislative requirements.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

A summary of matters discussed at the Council Briefings are presented for community information.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. the Informal Meetings of Councillors Report be received.**

ATTACHMENTS

The Summary of Council Briefings are provided as Attachment 6.1.

SECTION 7 - NOTICES OF MOTION

A *notice of motion* must be in writing signed by a Councillor and be lodged with or sent to the *Chief Executive Officer* no later than 12.00pm (noon) and at least six (6) days prior to the Council Meeting to allow sufficient time for the *Chief Executive Officer* to include the *notice of motion* in agenda papers for a *Council meeting*.

SECTION 8 - URGENT BUSINESS

Items cannot be admitted as urgent business other than by resolution of *Council* and only then if it:

- 1 relates to or arises out of a matter which has arisen since distribution of the *agenda*; and
- 2 cannot safely or conveniently be deferred until the next *Council meeting*.

SECTION 9 - CLOSE SESSION (CONFIDENTIAL)

In accordance with section 66(2)(a), 3(1) *Confidential Information* (a) of the Local Government Act 2020, the following agenda items are listed for consideration in the confidential section:

- Item 9.1 – Bridge Strengthening - McCrows Road Bridge

CLOSURE OF COUNCIL MEETING TO THE PUBLIC

The Open Council Meeting will now be closed, but members of the public are welcome to rejoin the Council Meeting following the recommencement of the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

That the meeting be closed to members of the public pursuant to section 66(2)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 to consider confidential reports.

OPEN COUNCIL MEETING RECOMMENCEMENT

RECOMMENDATION

That the Open Council Meeting recommence.

Gallery invited to return to Council Chamber.

LIFTING OF CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLOSED SESSION RESOLUTIONS

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. The confidentiality of the report and decision in relation to Confidential Agenda Item 9.1 not be lifted on adoption of the motion.**