

**DRAFT REVISED
COMMUNITY
STRATEGIC
PLAN 2018-2028**



CENTRAL COAST

Acknowledging the financial situation and the community's sentiment

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WE ARE ONE CENTRAL COAST

A smart, green and liveable region with a shared sense of belonging and responsibility

Introduction

The Community Strategic Plan (CSP) represents the highest level of strategic planning undertaken by a local council and identifies the main priorities and aspirations of the community, providing a clear set of objectives to achieve this vision. It is a ten-year plan for the future.

Council has a custodial role in engaging, refining and preparing the plan on behalf of its community. Council must always keep the CSP at the forefront when planning, designing and implementing projects, to make sure it is delivering on the Community’s desires and needs.

The inaugural Community Strategic Plan, *One - Central Coast*, was endorsed by Council on 25 June 2018.

Since its adoption Council’s financial situation has significantly changed. The CSP as it stands does not reflect the current community sentiment or acknowledgement of Council’s commitment to financial responsibility on behalf of the community.

Under usual circumstances a full review of the CSP is required when a local government election is held. As Central Coast Council is currently under Administration, the elections have been deferred by the Minister for Local Government. In this intervening time, it is important that the CSP reflects the community’s view regarding the financial situation, but also recognising that a full CSP review will be undertaken with the community once the elections are held. Therefore, the following Phases will be undertaken to review the CSP.

Phase 1: Desktop Review. As part of this Phase, community engagement feedback sought about Council’s financial situation has been analysed to understand what our community is feeling and what our community wants from their Council. Amendments to the CSP to reflect and acknowledge this are contained in this revised version. No other changes will be made to the CSP as part of this Phase.

Phase 2: Comprehensive Review. This Phase is in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993* and is triggered by a Local Government election. A date for the election is yet to be announced by the Minister for Local Government. This Phase will include community engagement to determine if the CSP is still what our community aspire to. This Phase is focusses on the feedback from our community, shared with the elected body and any changes to the CSP are made directly as a result of community feedback.

Source: Community Strategic Plan 2018-2028. The link to this document can be found at: <https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/council/forms-and-publications/community-strategic-plan>



**Belonging,
Smart, Green,
Responsible,
Liveable**

Background

In October 2020 Council announced that it was in a serious financial situation, requiring it to address an accumulated debt of \$565 million, which included accessing restricted funds that had been spent unlawfully on projects that the community had benefitted from. In response to this, the Minister for Local Government placed Council under Administration and commissioned a public inquiry into Central Coast Council. To oversee the financial recovery an Administrator was appointed.

Council has taken decisive actions in a short space of time since uncovering this serious financial situation. We have implemented measures to manage costs including significant staff reductions, restrictions of spending and reducing capital works projects, selling property assets, obtained external bank loans to reimburse the restricted funds and implemented productivity improvements to ensure the necessary cost-cutting measures have meant minimal service reductions for the community. A temporary rate increase of 15% was also approved by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in May 2021 for three years and most recently IPART has approved the 15% for a further seven years, or ten years in total.

During the application process for the rate increase, the community was invited to complete a survey on options and provide feedback. The feedback clearly conveyed the disappointment and anger of our community regarding the financial situation. Whilst Council is committed to achieving financial sustainability, we also need to recognise the voice of the community and reflect this in the CSP. This sentiment has been captured in this Phase 1 revision.

Review of Community Feedback

What the Community said

Following a review of community feedback, it is evident that the financial situation is a significant issue that the community wants acknowledged and addressed. A sample size of the 10,000 responses submitted regarding the new rates was reviewed and it was found that more than 57% of respondents listed financial mismanagement as a key area of concern and that the community overwhelmingly wanted Council to 'fix the problem.'

The main themes from the analysis of this community feedback showed us that the following items are of great importance to our community, and thus, need to be reflected in the revised CSP:

- There is a lack of trust in Central Coast Council, in both governance, skill and capacity to deliver services within budget. Many respondents expressed frustration with the lack of transparency around who is accountable for the financial situation and what actions will be taken against individuals or entities.
- Affordability and hardship are issues for our community, with over 30% of the respondents expressing concern around this. The impact of the rate rise will impact many single income and older residents. Many in the community did not support a rate rise and felt that ratepayers should not shoulder the burden of Council's mistake/s.
- Value for money was a recurring theme. The community raised concerns about current infrastructure being inadequate to meet community needs, including maintenance of roads, kerb and guttering, open space and natural assets. The community is not confident that the rate rise is enough to fix

existing issues, as well as deliver day to day service delivery.

- The minority who supported a rate rise, did so with the hope that it will bring more security and stability to Council's ongoing financial situation and would sustain service levels.

How the Community feels

The community understandably feels angry, and disappointed with the events that unfolded around the financial situation. The community feels let down by their Council and elected members. The community also feels as though they are paying for Council and the Leadership Team's incompetence and mistakes, with the community wanting any changes to benefit them, but for there to also be a guarantee that Council will be financially sustainable in the future.

An overwhelming number of residents feel there is no accountability, and this is the key driver in proposing a financial accountability objective in the CSP.

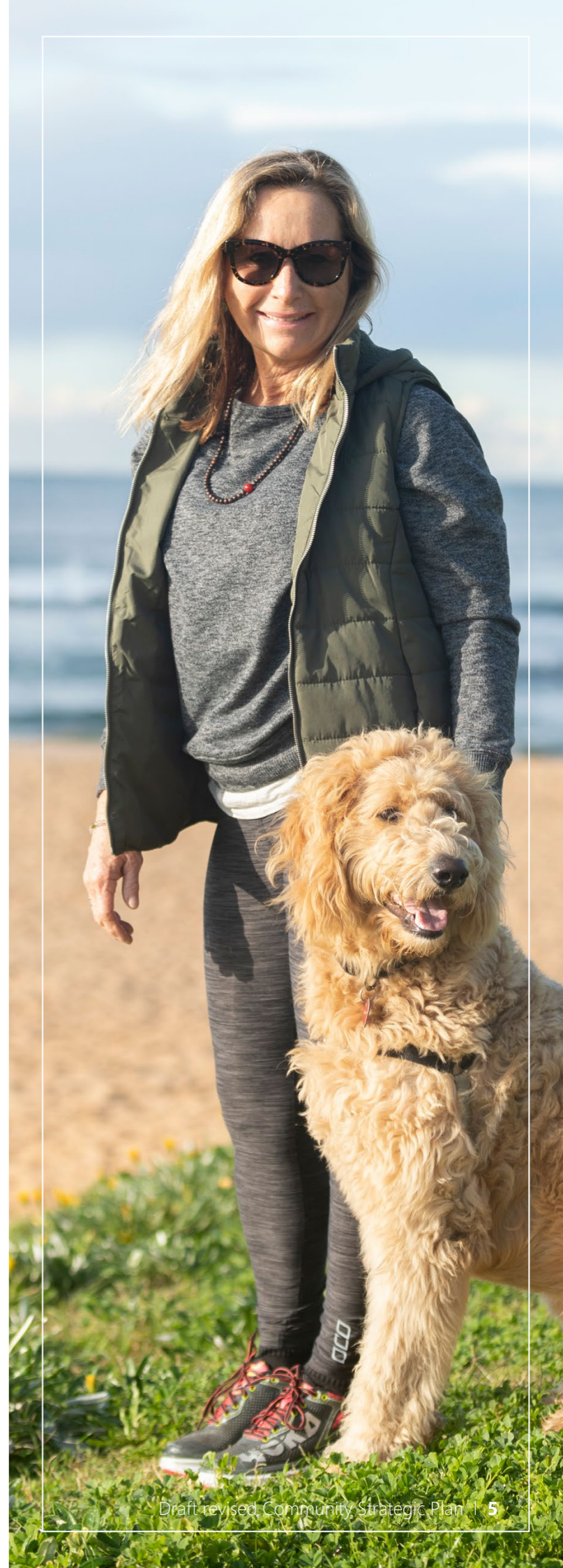
What the Community wants from their Council

The community wants acknowledgement. The changes included in this revision are part of that acknowledgement. Central Coast Council knows it needs to do better, as an organisation and for the Central Coast community and is committed to this.

Going forward, the community wants increased transparency and accessibility on how and where rate payer's money is spent. Their feedback has informed the revisions in the CSP around the following themes:

- Financial accountability
- Financial management
- Leadership and governance
- Trust and transparency
- Security for the longevity of our region

Source: Central Coast Council Consultation Report 'Securing your future with a rate rise'. 4 February 2021. The link to this document can be found at <https://www.yourvoiceourcoast.com/all-projects/securing-your-future-rate-rise>



Community Reference Group

In February 2022, Expressions of Interest were sought from people who live or work on the Central Coast to become part of a Community Reference Group (CRG). The purpose of group was to provide advice and guidance on the Revised CSP and Delivery Program, helping to ensure both are appropriate, effective and focus on the needs of the Central Coast and its residents. The preferred number of members on the CRG was 10 to 15 representatives.

The CRG reviewed the Revised CSP and Delivery Program 2022-2025 (including the Operational Plan 2022-23) over a course of five meetings. The CRG had various viewpoints on the financial situation and how Council should be reflecting this in the CSP. Through all the feedback, input and viewpoints provided, the CRG was consistent and confirmed two out of the above key themes. These were the themes of:

- Leadership and governance; and
- Trust and transparency

The CRG's feedback has been incorporated into the CSP, with a summary of the amendments in the next section.

Phase 1 - Final Amendments

Rationale for Amendments

The key themes that were identified from community feedback and have informed the revisions in this document include:

- Financial accountability
- Financial management
- Leadership and governance
- Trust and transparency (included in objective G2)
- Security for the longevity of our region

The CRG has also had an opportunity to provide feedback and input into these amendments.

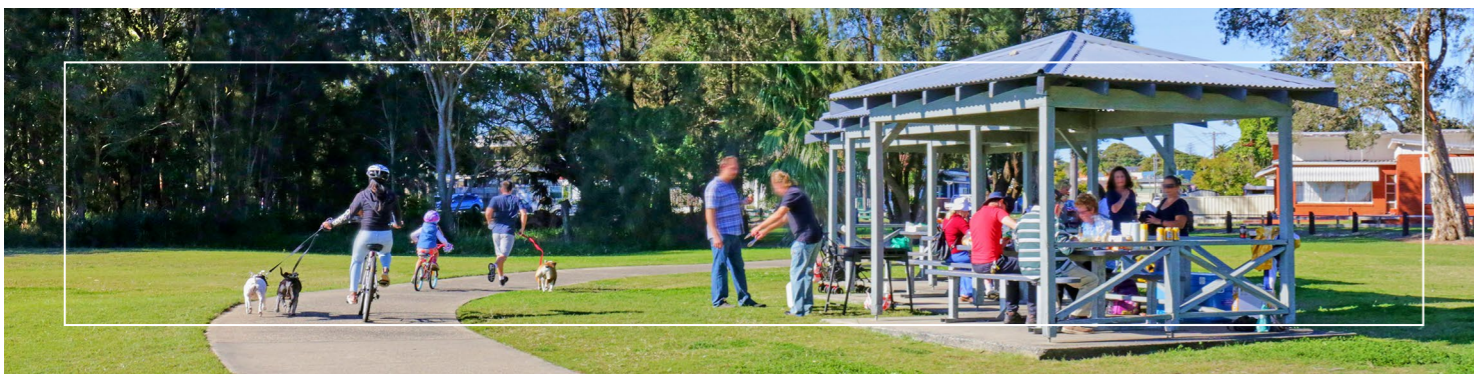
Summary of proposed CSP amendments

Based on the analysis and above key themes, it is proposed that amendments are made to the Objectives and Indicators under the CSP Theme and Focus Area of *Responsible: Good Governance and Great Partnerships*.

In summary, the proposed amendments include:

- Streamlining the original G2 and G3 Objective into one
- The inclusion of a new Objective (G3) to reflect Council's commitment to financial responsibility.
- Additional indicators to measure the new G3 Objective.


It should be noted that the G1 and G4 Objectives will remain unchanged. These respond to partnerships and service delivery, which are still very much at the forefront of the community's mind.



Original and Amended CSP Objectives

Responsible	Current CSP Objectives	Proposed CSP Objectives
Good Governance and Great Partnerships 	G1 – Build strong relationships and ensure our partners and community share the responsibilities and benefits of putting plans in practice	G1 – Build strong relationships and ensure our partners and community share the responsibilities and benefits of putting plans in practice
	G2 – Communicate openly and honestly with the community to build a relationship based on transparency, understanding, trust and respect	G2 - Engage and communicate openly and honestly with the community to build a relationship based on trust, transparency, respect and use community participation and feedback to inform decision making
	G3 – Engage with the community in meaningful dialogue and demonstrate how community participation is being use to inform decisions	G3 - Provide leadership that is transparent and accountable, makes decisions in the best interest of the community, ensures Council is financially sustainable and adheres to a strong audit process
	G4 - Serve the community by providing great customer experience, value for money and quality services	G4 - Serve the community by providing great customer experience, value for money and quality services

Original and Additional CSP Indicators

Responsible	Current CSP Indicators	Additional CSP Indicators
Good Governance and Great Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community organisations, boards and committees • Participation in community engagement • Satisfaction that Council is a well-run organisation • Satisfaction that Council makes decisions in the community's interests • Satisfaction with State and Local Government service delivery • Condition of assets and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership team (Councillors and CEO) makes clear and informed decisions around public participation, governance and finances • Achieve the annual operating result as described in the adopted Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) • Monthly, quarterly and annual financial reports available to the community • Annual progress reporting on the financial indicators as described in the adopted Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) (such as ratios on operating performance, cash expense and infrastructure backlog etc)

Responsible	Current CSP Indicators	Additional CSP Indicators
<p>Good Governance and Great Partnerships</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of downloads / website visits to the financial reports • The community's confidence and trust in Council's ability to manage finances increases annually • Number of submissions received through public exhibitions of strategic documents and changes made as a result

Next Steps

The Draft Revised CSP is on public exhibition and contains the above amendments. It is now your turn to have your say and tell us if this is a small, but meaningful change captures the community's sentiment on financial management and sustainability.

As noted in the Introduction, these amendments are focussed on the financial situation only. There will be comprehensive community engagement and a review of the whole CSP as part of Phase 2. This will follow the Local Government elections for the Central Coast, with further information to come.

Central Coast Council has achieved one of the most significant financial turnarounds of any organisation in under 12 months, with the current and forecasted surpluses repaying the emergency loans over the next 10 years. Measuring performance against this new Objective in a clear and accessible way for the community will ensure that Council stays accountable and on track. While the Revised CSP outlines small changes only, they are a significant step in working towards building your trust, confidence, and belief in Council to be able to serve the community. It will take time to build trust back with our community, but Council will not give up and will continue to aspire to be a region that is Smart, Green and Liveable and has a shared sense of Belonging and Responsibility.



Draft Revised Community Strategic Plan

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