

Councillor Column

By Shire President Victoria Brown and Deputy Natalie Bowman.

Lately we have seen a number of scathing letters to the editor in our local paper from some members of our community who have an opinion on your local shire council and the shire staff.

These letters have called into question the ethics, morals and motivation of Councillors and staff. We cannot respond to all letters to the editor, this would not be appropriate. People should be encouraged to voice their ideas and opinions and this is the core purpose of letters submitted. However letters containing gross inaccuracies, unfounded allegations and, at times, defamatory remarks are not acceptable. Have the authors approached Council to ask their questions? No. Have the claims being made been supported by facts? No.

When you read these letters, please note the motivation of the writer, and remember:

Motivation

- your councillors are members of your community and were elected by you to make decisions
- your councillors live here, work here, love it here and have put their hand up to take on the job to give back to their community and continue to make it a great place to live, work and play
- The staff at the Shire are professionals, many of whom have families here, volunteer in local community groups, and love Esperance - they choose to be here

Governance

- This council is making decisions - as tough as they may be
- Your Shire recently achieved very high ratings in an external Better Practice review of council practices and governance
- Your Shire has voluntarily taken part in a recent Governance review
- Decisions made by council are made after reviewing the facts and using correct local government process
- Your Shire has been commended for its commitment and steps taken towards becoming sustainable

Finances

- Your Shire was ranked highly in the last state Financial Health Index (14/15)
- This Council has put in place a sustainable plan for the future showing how we can continue to provide services and maintain assets whilst keeping

- forecast rate increases as low as possible, currently forecast at 4.5% per year. That has never been in place before and the projected rates increases are among the lowest they have been in 11 years
- Your Shire has increased spending on maintaining and renewing the community's assets like roads, playgrounds, buildings etc by \$3.5m (50%) over the last 5 years to ensure that they are sustainable in the longer term
- The Shire's finances are available each month for everyone to see and question. Annual financial reports and budgets are also public documents

Decisions

- The jetty has been a concern for this community for the past 30 years. This Council made a decision on the best way forward to getting what the community wants - a usable jetty, this has unfortunately stalled and an immediate outcome is unlikely
- After 5 years of investigation this council has made a decision on a new waste facility location. Some people may not agree with this decision, however the purchase decision was made in December 2016 subject to a due diligence period. At the completion of this period there was no scientific or environmental reason for us to walk away from this site, waste the money spent on investigation and start the process again. All reports indicate that this site is suitable for a best practice waste facility. Council is committed to managing our community's waste sustainably and continues to look at ways of reducing landfill requirements.
- This council has completed the first two stages of the foreshore project, resolving a long term ongoing erosion issue and greatly improving community infrastructure
- This council is continually looking at the bigger picture and the impact its decisions will have on our future community.
- This council has improved facilities for youth by building a new skate park and youth precinct and is continuing to work with this group on further improvements.

If you have concerns about your council's ability or why a decision was made come in and ask the questions in person, get the information for yourself and if you still are not satisfied, take the next step and report your concerns to the relevant authorities.

What makes our community our community? Trusting each other and working together for the benefit of everyone.