

**INQUIRY INTO ABILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO
FUND INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 25 April 2024

Partially
Confidential

I have been a resident and ratepayer in this shire for the last 21 years.

During this time, I have seen Leeton degrade from being a positive, vibrant, clean place with a bright future to a town where public bins have been removed and the sense of desperation permeates from one disastrous project to another. The star of our town, The Roxy Theatre, is now a black hole sucking millions without a foreseeable end; the completion of stage 2 of the project is wholly dependent on Regional Grants funding or more fund-raising initiatives. Other seemingly cost-effective projects such as the pool development were littered with constant costly errors. Major staff restructures have led to unsustainable increases in full time employees in managerial roles and significant administration costs. The consistent hiring of 'consultants' to fix up managerial errors only adds to debt. The list goes on. And the impending threat of permanent SRVs to the tune of 60 to 65% has caused many residents to leave.

How did things eventuate to this? What has happened?

It seems that the nepotistic culture of the council and consistent mismanagement on a local government level has led to a series of poor decisions being made. Subsequent irresponsible financial planning has basically sent our shire on the path to bankruptcy. The Leeton Shire Council, once declared one of the most financially robust councils of its size several years ago, has been running at a loss since 2020, despite *creative accounting* telling another story. The 22/23 so called surplus was a manufactured false result, designed to avoid 4 consecutive deficits and the inevitable investigation that would have been triggered (as alluded to in a councilor's leaked emails). The word on the street is that the anomalous surplus of 22/23 resulted from another accounting error in which government grant funding was counted twice, hence the illusion of a surplus. In fact, the Council has now run 4 budget deficits and should be under administration.

This warrants an investigation into possible fraudulent activity. However, while in this case it may have been used to the council's advantage, it should also have the opposite effect on any SRV proposal. It would seem inevitable that if the status quo is maintained, our council will be making a submission to you, IPART, for an SRV at some stage in the not-too-distant future. It is hoped that when the submission is made, IPART will notice this "surplus" in 22/23 which should then lead you to inquire why –

- A) an SRV of such a substantial amount is warranted and
- B) is permanent.

As it stands, costs keep creeping up. Business owners are too afraid to criticize the council for fear of repercussions.

Though correlation is not causation, it may be of interest to note that things began to go pear shaped with the arrival of an individual with a checkered history in local government affairs. This person does not have any business, financial or legal qualification that would

serve as the most basic essential job requirement for effective and prudent decision making by the position occupied by the individual. Unsurprisingly, this person's circle of employee supporters has grown as a mechanism to establish control of the organization and to the detriment of the delivery of services to the rate payers of Leeton Shire.