

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

Leeton has been my home since 2003. In the beginning, it was a fantastic place to live. Now, it is becoming a financial and personal stress living here. This reached boiling point in the SRV public consultations in 2022. The most dumbfounding statement made then was by the General Manager, Jackie Kruger. "If you don't want the SRV, then tell me who to sack (or words to that effect which, which can be extracted from the recording at the Historic Hydro in the early evening meeting).

A similar question was posed by a Councillor at a recent Council meeting. "If the next SRV is rejected again, what services do you want cut?" This Councillor was under the impression that the services enjoyed by Leeton Shire's residents have increased over the last 21 years of my residence here. In fact, I cannot identify a single service being added to the list of Council's activities. Yet, we are still running a budget loss.

Perhaps this may be associated with the number of Council employees. In the 2016/2017 financial year, there were 107 FTE employees. In the following sequence of financial years, 117, 117, 117, 137, 156, 157 in the 2022/2023 year. All these extra people, all that extra wage bill but no corresponding increase in services provided to the ratepayers in my 21 years as a diligent rate payer.

It seems that at least one Councillor is aware of the Councils ballooning staff number. This Councillor, in response to the failed 2022 SRV states, "I envisage we need to shed 30 to 40 staff by the end of the financial year." In this 'austerity' mindset, it is also recommended that "low hanging fruit" be trimmed from Council budget to prevent it becoming insolvent and in contravention of the act. The axing of such fruit, like the Community Grants scheme, the chill & grill and Sunrice festivals, would have a direct and immediate effect on the whole community of Leeton. In case you are unaware, these are major social gatherings that promote social cohesion and to suggest that they be pruned from the social life of Leeton so that Council can sustain its bloated wages bill is a gross affront to the public. Indeed, it is bureaucracy that looks after itself at the expense of the worker.

On this self-interest of Council, a Councillor criticises one's colleagues who voted against the SRV for not having possessing the required accounting and financial qualifications to understand the long term impacts of their vote against the SRV. That is, there were an adequate number of Councillors with empathy for the imposte that the SRV would place upon the already financially struggling people of Leeton. Why didn't this Councillor suggest that Council staff be trimmed back to a financially sustainable level? Fortunately, compassion trumped this rather condescending Councillor's cold heart and the economic hardship of an SRV defeated.

All this goes to show that how the Council operates is not efficient, effective nor in the best interest of the community it is supposed to be serving. Leeton Shire is in the financial pickle it is because it does not have the business acumen to manage projects, the business acumen to make long range financial plans relative to the local business conditions or the organisational structure that best suites its financial means.

NB. The noted emails were verified as sent and received by Councillors.