Melton City Council

Draft Revenue and Ratings Plan

2025/26 to 2029/30

CITY OF MELTON

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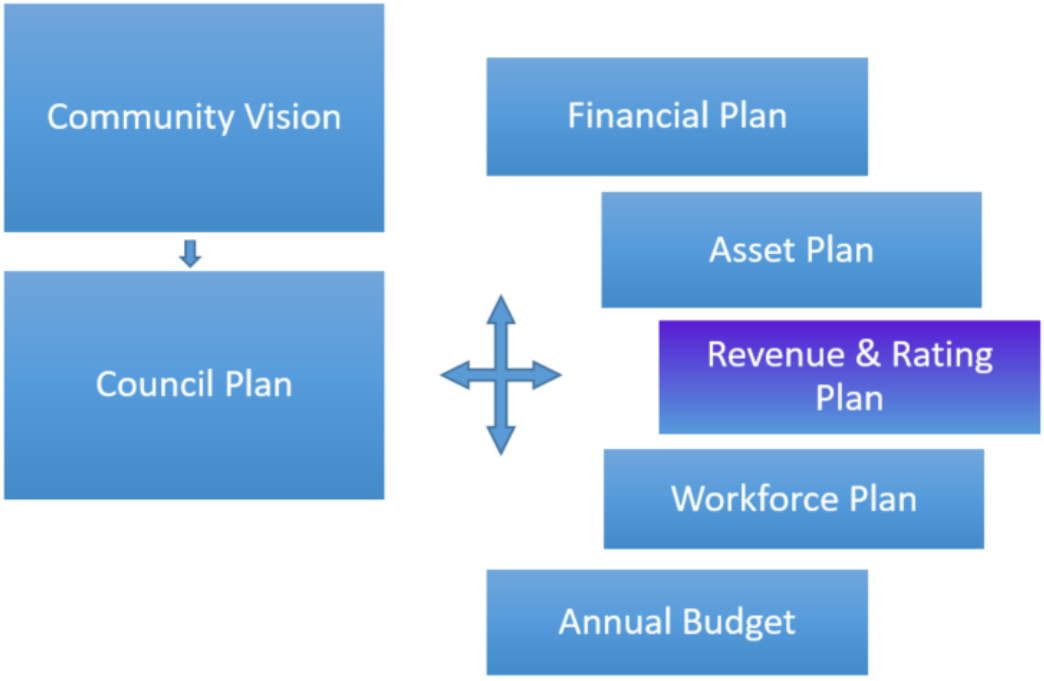
1.1 PURPOSE

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires each council to prepare a Revenue and Rating Plan to cover a minimum period of four years following each Council election. The Revenue and Rating Plan establishes the revenue raising framework within which the Council proposes to work.

The purpose of the Revenue and Rating Plan is to determine the most appropriate and affordable revenue and rating approach for Melton City Council which in conjunction with other income sources will adequately finance the objectives in the council plan.

This plan is an important part of Council's integrated planning framework, all of which is created to help Council achieve its vision of a vibrant, safe and liveable City accessible to all.

Strategies outlined in this plan align with the objectives contained in the Council Plan and will feed into our budgeting and long-term financial planning documents, as well as other strategic planning documents under our Council's strategic planning framework.



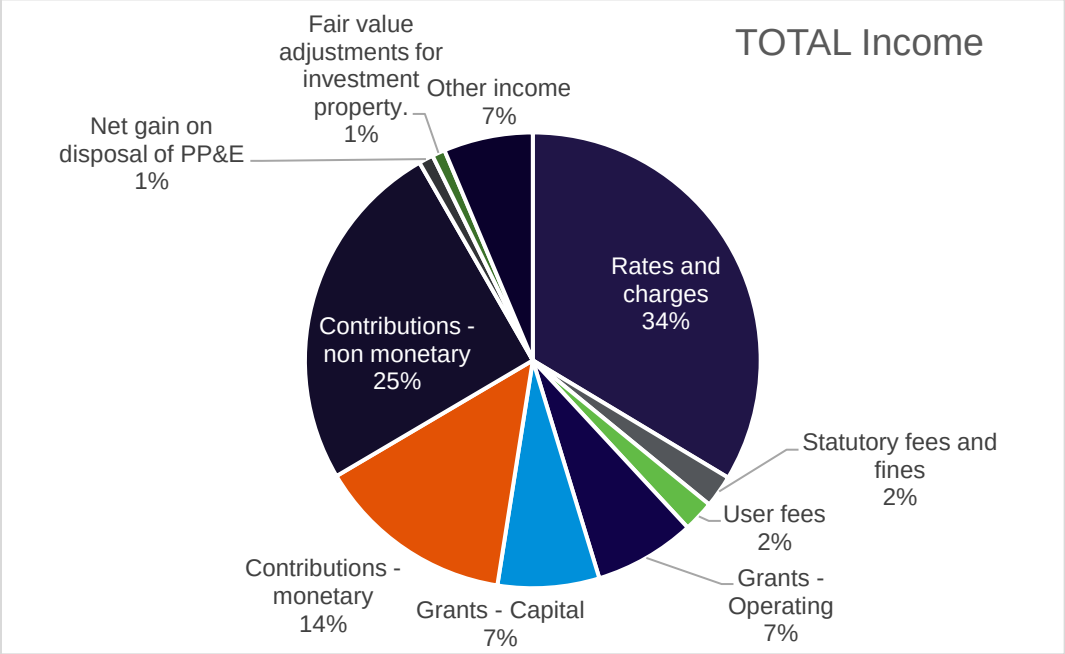
This plan will explain how Council calculates the revenue needed to fund its activities, and how the funding burden will be apportioned between ratepayers and other users of Council facilities and services.

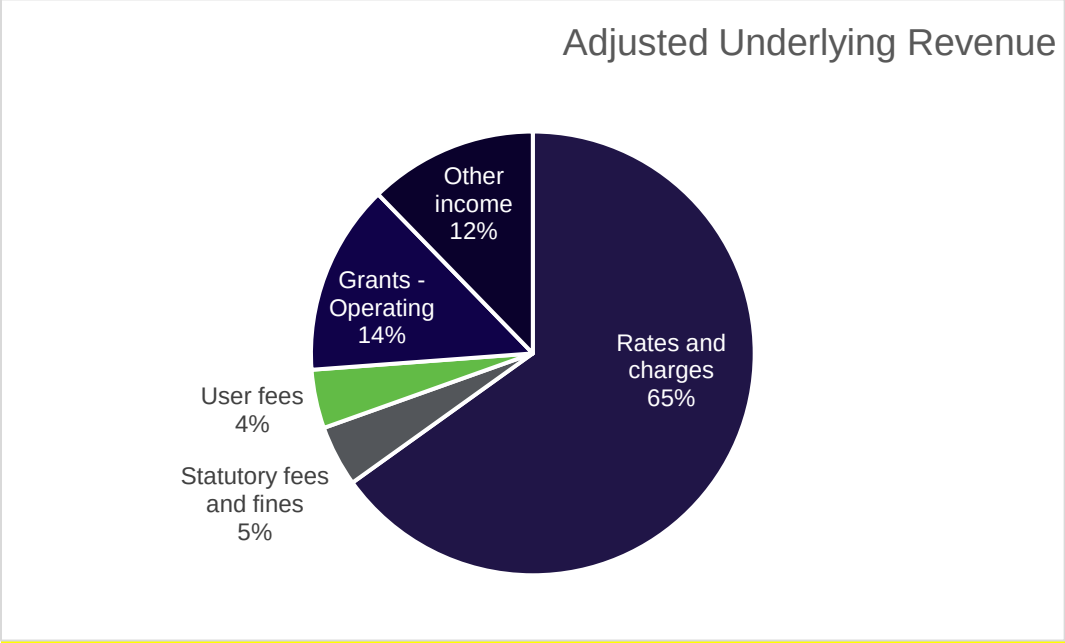
In particular, this plan will set out decisions that Council has made in relation to rating options available to it under the *Local Government Act 2020* to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of rates across property owners. It will also set out principles that are used in decision making for other revenue sources such as fees and charges.

It is also important to note that this plan does not set revenue targets for Council, it outlines the strategic framework and decisions that inform how Council will go about calculating and collecting its revenue.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Council provides a number of services and facilities to our local community, and in doing so, must collect revenue to cover the cost of providing these services and facilities. Below is a snapshot of Council's revenue sources.





	2025/26			
	Total Income $'000		Adjusted Underlying Revenue $'000	
Rates and charges	206,022	34%	206,022	65%
Statutory fees and fines	14,068	2%	14,068	4%
User fees	13,526	2%	13,526	4%
Grants - Operating	43,985	7%	43,985	14%
Grants - Capital	44,170	7%		0%
Contributions - monetary	86,031	14%		0%
Contributions - non monetary	154,410	25%		0%
Net gain on disposal of PP&E	6,330	1%		0%
Fair value adjustments for investment property	5,623	1%		0%
Other income	38,848	6%	38,848	12%
TOTAL Income	**613,013**	**100%**	**316,449**	**100%**

The figures above are taken from the Comprehensive Income Statement section 3 of the budget

Council's revenue sources include:

- Rates and Charges
- Waste and garbage charges (if applicable)
- Grants from other levels of Government
- Statutory Fees and Fines
- User Fees
- Cash and non-cash contributions from other parties (i.e. developers, community groups)
- Interest from investments
- Sale of Assets

Rates and charges are the most significant revenue source for Council and make up roughly 65% of Council's underlying budgeted 2025/26 income.

The introduction of rate capping under the Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates System (FGRS) has brought a renewed focus to Council's long-term financial sustainability. The FGRS continues to restrict Council's ability to raise revenue above the rate cap unless application is made to the Essential Services Commission for a variation. Maintaining service delivery levels and investing in community assets remain key priorities for Council. This strategy will address Council's reliance on rate income and provide options to actively reduce that reliance.

Council provides a wide range of services to the community, often for a fee or charge. The nature of these fees and charges generally depends on whether they relate to statutory or discretionary services. Some of these, such as statutory planning fees are set by State Government statute and are commonly known as regulatory fees. In these cases, councils usually have no control over service pricing. However, in relation to other services, Council has the ability to set a fee or charge and will set that fee based on the principles outlined in this Revenue and Rating Plan.

Council revenue can also be adversely affected by changes to funding from other levels of government. Some grants are tied to the delivery of council services, whilst many are tied directly to the delivery of new community assets, such as roads or sports pavilions. It is important for Council to be clear about what grants it intends to apply for, and the obligations that grants create in the delivery of services or infrastructure.

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1.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Revenue and Rating Plan outlines Council's decision-making process on how revenues are calculated and collected. The following public consultation process will be followed to ensure due consideration and feedback is received from relevant stakeholders.

Revenue and Rating Plan community engagement process:

- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan prepared by officers;
- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan placed on public exhibition after 26 May 2025 Council meeting for a period of 14 days and calling for specific feedback;
- Community informed via print media and social media;
- Following community engagement, Council's Revenue and Rating Plan will be updated with any changes Council deems necessary based on community feedback received; and
- Melton City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 (with any revisions) presented to 23 June 2025 Council meeting for adoption.

1.4 RATES AND CHARGES

Rates are property taxes that allow Council to raise revenue to fund essential public services to cater to their municipal population. Importantly, it is a taxation system that includes flexibility for councils to utilise different tools in its rating structure to accommodate issues of equity and to ensure fairness in rating for all ratepayers.

Council has established a rating structure comprised of three key elements. These are:

- **General Rates** – Based on property values (using the Capital Improved Valuation methodology), which are indicative of capacity to pay and form the central basis of rating under the *Local Government Act 1989*;
- **Service Charges** - A 'user pays' component for council services to reflect benefits provided by Council to ratepayers who benefit from a service; and
- **Municipal Charge** - A 'fixed rate" portion per property to cover some of the administrative costs of Council.

Striking a proper balance between these elements will help to improve equity in the distribution of the rate burden across residents.

Council makes a further distinction when applying general rates by applying rating differentials based on the purpose for which the property is used. That is, whether the property is used for residential, commercial/industrial, or farming purposes. This distinction is based on the concept that different property categories should pay a fair and equitable contribution, taking into account the benefits those properties derive from the local community.

The Melton City Council rating structure comprises of nine differential rates. These rates are structured in accordance with the requirements of Section 161 'Differential Rates' of the *Local Government Act 1989*, and the Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013.

The differential rates are currently set as follows:

- General 100%
- Vacant Land 150%
- Extractive 288%
- Commercial/Industrial Developed 160%
- Commercial/Industrial Vacant 200%
- Retirement Village 85%
- Rural Living 90%
- Rural 72%
- Urban Growth 75%

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The differential rates are proposed to be set as follows in 2025/2026:

- General 100%
- Vacant Land 170%
- Extractive 288%
- Commercial/Industrial Developed 160%
- Commercial/Industrial Vacant 225%
- Retirement Village 85%
- Rural Living 90%
- Rural 72%
- Urban Growth 80%

Council also levies a municipal charge. The municipal charge is a minimum rate per property and declared for the purpose of covering some of the administrative costs of Council. In applying the municipal charge, Council ensures that each ratable property in the municipality makes a contribution.

The formula for calculating General Rates, excluding any additional charges, arrears or additional supplementary rates is:

- Valuation (Capital Improved Value) x Rate in the Dollar (Differential Rate Type)

The rate in the dollar for each rating differential category is included in Council's annual budget.

Rates and charges are an important source of revenue, accounting for over 65% of of its budgeted 2025/26 underlying operating revenue received by Council. The collection of rates is an important factor in funding Council services.

Planning for future rate increases is therefore an essential component of the long-term financial planning process and plays a significant role in funding both additional service delivery and the increasing costs related to providing Council services.

Council is aware of the balance between rate revenue (as an important income source) and community sensitivity to rate increases. With the introduction of the State Government's Fair Go Rates System, all rate increases are capped to a rate declared by the Minister for Local Government, which is announced in December for the following financial year.

Council currently utilises a service charge to recover a significant portion of the cost of Council's kerbside waste services. The waste service charge is not capped under the Fair Go Rates System, and Council will continue to allocate funds from this charge towards the provision of kerbside waste services.

1.4.1 RATING LEGISLATION

The legislative framework set out in the *Local Government Act 1989* determines Council's ability to develop a rating system. The framework provides significant flexibility for Council to tailor a system that suits its needs.

Section 155 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may declare the following rates and charges on rateable land:

- General rates under Section 158
- Municipal charges under Section 159
- Service rates and charges under Section 162
- Special rates and charges under Section 163

The recommended strategy in relation to municipal charges, service rates and charges and special rates and charges are discussed later in this document.

In raising Council rates, Council is required to primarily use the valuation of the rateable property to levy rates. Section 157 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides Council with three choices in terms of which valuation base to utilise. They are: Site Valuation, Capital Improved Valuation (CIV) and Net Annual Value (NAV).

The advantages and disadvantages of the respective valuation basis are discussed further in this document. Whilst this document outlines Council's strategy regarding rates revenue, rates data will be contained in the Council's Annual Budget as required by the *Local Government Act 2020.*

Section 94(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that Council must adopt a budget by 30 June each year (or at another time fixed by the Minister) to include:

a) the total amount that the Council intends to raise by rates and charges;
b) a statement as to whether the rates will be raised by the application of a uniform rate or a differential rate:
c) a description of any fixed component of the rates, if applicable;
d) if the Council proposes to declare a uniform rate, the matters specified in section 160 of the *Local Government Act 1989*;
e) if the Council proposes to declare a differential rate for any land, the matters specified in section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*;

Section 94(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020* also states that Council must ensure that, if applicable, the budget also contains a statement –

a) that the Council intends to apply for a special order to increase the Council's average rate cap for the financial year or any other financial year; or
b) that the Council has made an application to the ESC for a special order and is waiting for the outcome of the application; or
c) that a special Order has been made in respect of the Council and specifying the average rate cap that applies for the financial year or any other financial year.

This plan outlines the principles and strategic framework that Council will utilise in calculating and distributing the rating burden to property owners, however, the quantum of rate revenue and rating differential amounts will be determined in the annual Melton City Council budget.

In 2019 the Victorian State Government conducted a Local Government Rating System Review. The Local Government Rating System Review Panel presented their final report and list of recommendations to the Victorian Government in March 2020. The Victorian Government subsequently published a response to the recommendations of the Panel's report. However, at the time of publication the recommended changes have not yet been implemented, and timelines to make these changes have not been announced.

1.4.2 RATING PRINCIPLES

Taxation Principles:

When developing a rating strategy, in particular with reference to differential rates, a Council should give consideration to the following good practice taxation principles:

- Wealth Tax
- Equity
- Efficiency
- Simplicity
- Benefit
- Capacity to Pay
- Diversity.

Wealth Tax

The “wealth tax” principle implies that the rates paid are dependent upon the value of a ratepayer’s real property and have no correlation to the individual ratepayer’s consumption of services or the perceived benefits derived by individual ratepayers from the expenditures funded from rates.

Equity

Horizontal equity – ratepayers in similar situations should pay similar amounts of rates (ensured mainly by accurate property valuations, undertaken in a consistent manner, their classification into homogenous property classes and the right of appeal against valuation).

Vertical equity – those who are better off should pay more rates than those worse off (the rationale applies for the use of progressive and proportional income taxation. It implies a “relativity” dimension to the fairness of the tax burden).

Efficiency

Economic efficiency is measured by the extent to which production and consumption decisions by people are affected by rates.

Simplicity

How easily a rates system can be understood by ratepayers and the practicality and ease of administration.

Benefit

The extent to which there is a nexus between consumption/benefit and the rate burden.

Capacity to Pay

The capacity of ratepayers or groups of ratepayers to pay rates.

Diversity

The capacity of ratepayers within a group to pay rates.

The rating challenge for Council therefore is to determine the appropriate balancing of competing considerations.

<u>Rates and Charges Revenue Principles:</u>

Property rates will:

- be reviewed annually;
- not change dramatically from one year to next; and
- be sufficient to fund current expenditure commitments and deliverables outlined in the Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

Differential rating should be applied as equitably as is practical and will comply with the ministerial Guidelines for Differential rating 2013.

1.4.3 DETERMINING WHICH VALUATION BASE TO USE

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council has three options as to the valuation base it elects to use. They are:

- **Capital Improved Value (CIV)** – Value of land and improvements upon the land.
- **Site Value (SV)** – Value of land only.
- **Net Annual Value (NAV)** – Rental valuation based on CIV.

For residential and farm properties, NAV is calculated at 5 per cent of the Capital Improved Value. For commercial and industrial properties, NAV is calculated as the greater of the estimated annual rental value or 5 per cent of the CIV.

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Capital Improved Value (CIV)

Capital Improved Value is the most commonly used valuation base by local government with over 90% of Victorian councils applying this methodology. Based on the value of both land and all improvements on the land, it is generally easily understood by ratepayers as it equates to the market value of the property.

Section 161 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate if –

a) It uses the capital improved value system of valuing land; and

b) It considers that a differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.

Where a council does not utilise CIV, it may only apply limited differential rates in relation to farm land, urban farm land or residential use land.

Advantages of using Capital Improved Value (CIV)

- CIV includes all property improvements, and hence is often supported on the basis that it more closely reflects "capacity to pay". The CIV rating method takes into account the full development value of the property, and hence better meets the equity criteria than Site Value and NAV.
- With the increased frequency of valuations (previously two year intervals, now annual intervals) the market values are more predictable and has reduced the level of objections resulting from valuations.
- The concept of the market value of property is more easily understood with CIV rather than NAV or SV.
- Most councils in Victoria have now adopted CIV which makes it easier to compare relative movements in rates and valuations across councils.
- The use of CIV allows council to apply differential rates which greatly adds to council's ability to equitably distribute the rating burden based on ability to afford council rates. CIV allows council to apply higher rating differentials to the commercial and industrial sector that offset residential rates.

Disadvantages of using CIV

- The main disadvantage with CIV is the fact that rates are based on the total property value which may not necessarily reflect the income level of the property owner as with pensioners and low-income earners.

Site value (SV)

There are currently no Victorian councils that use this valuation base. With valuations based simply on the valuation of land and with only very limited ability to apply differential rates, the implementation of Site Value in a Melton City Council context would cause a shift in rate burden from the industrial/commercial sectors onto the residential sector, and would hinder council's objective of a fair and equitable rating system.

There would be further rating movements away from modern townhouse style developments on relatively small land parcels to older established homes on quarter acre residential blocks. In many ways, it is difficult to see an equity argument being served by the implementation of site valuation in the Melton City Council.

Advantages of Site Value

- There is a perception that under site value, a uniform rate would promote development of land, particularly commercial and industrial developments. There is, however, little evidence to prove that this is the case.
- Scope for possible concessions for urban farm-land and residential use land.

Disadvantages of using Site Value

- Under SV, there will be a significant shift from the industrial/commercial sector onto the residential sector of council. The percentage increases in many cases would be in the extreme range.
- SV is a major burden on property owners that have large areas of land. Some of these owners may have much smaller/older dwellings compared to those who have smaller land areas but well developed dwellings - but will pay more in rates. A typical example is flats, units, or townhouses which will all pay low rates compared to traditional housing styles.
- The use of SV can place pressure on council to give concessions to categories of landowners on whom the rating burden is seen to fall disproportionately (e.g. Farm land and residential use properties). Large landowners, such as farmers for example, are disadvantaged by the use of site value.
- SV will reduce Council's rating flexibility and options to deal with any rating inequities due to the removal of the ability to levy differential rates.
- The community may have greater difficulty in understanding the SV valuation on their rate notices, as indicated by many inquiries from ratepayers on this issue handled by council's customer service and property revenue staff each year.

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Net annual value (NAV)

NAV, in concept, represents the annual rental value of a property. However, in practice, NAV is loosely linked to capital improved value for residential and farm properties. Valuers derive the NAV directly as 5 per cent of CIV.

In contrast to the treatment of residential and farm properties, NAV for commercial and industrial properties are assessed with regard to actual market rental. This differing treatment of commercial versus residential and farm properties has led to some suggestions that all properties should be valued on a rental basis.

Overall, the use of NAV is not largely supported. For residential and farm ratepayers, actual rental values pose some problems. The artificial rental estimate used may not represent actual market value, and means the base is the same as CIV but is harder to understand.

Recommended valuation base

In choosing a valuation base, councils must decide on whether they wish to adopt a differential rating system (different rates in the dollar for different property categories) or a uniform rating system (same rate in the dollar). If a council was to choose the former, under the *Local Government Act 1989* it must adopt either of the CIV or NAV methods of rating.

Melton City Council applies Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the fully developed value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land plus buildings and other improvements.

Differential rating allows (under the CIV method) council to shift part of the rate burden from some groups of ratepayers to others, through different “rates in the dollar” for each class of property.

Section 161(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* outlines the requirements relating to differential rates, which include:

a) A Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate, if Council considers that the differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.
b) If a Council declares a differential rate for any land, the Council must specify the objectives of the differential rate, which must be consistent with the equitable and efficient carrying out of the Councils functions and must include the following:
    i. A definition of the types or classes of land which are subject to the rate and a statement of the reasons for the use and level of that rate.
    ii. An identification of the type or classes of land which are subject to the rate in respect of the uses, geographic location (other than location on the basis of whether or not the land is within a specific ward in Council’s district).
    iii. Specify the characteristics of the land, which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

Once the Council has declared a differential rate for any land, the Council must:

a) Specify the objectives of the differential rates;
b) Specify the characteristics of the land which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

The purpose is to ensure that Council has a sound basis on which to develop the various charging features when determining its revenue strategies and ensure that these are consistent with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

The general objectives of each of the differential rates are to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. There is no limit on the number or types of differential rates that can be levied, but the highest differential rate can be no more than four times the lowest differential rate.

Property Valuations

The *Valuation of Land Act 1960* is the principle legislation in determining property valuations. Under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*, the Victorian Valuer-General conducts property valuations on an annual basis. Melton City Council applies a Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the full development value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land including buildings and other improvements.

The value of land is always derived by the principal of valuing land for its highest and best use at the relevant time of valuation.

Council needs to be mindful of the impacts of revaluations on the various property types in implementing the differential rating strategy outlined in the previous section to ensure that rises and falls in council rates remain affordable and that rating ‘shocks’ are mitigated to some degree.

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Supplementary Valuations

Supplementary valuations are carried out for a variety of reasons including rezoning, subdivisions, amalgamations, renovations, new constructions, extensions, occupancy changes and corrections. The Victorian Valuer-General is tasked with undertaking supplementary valuations and advises council on a monthly basis of valuation and Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) changes.

Supplementary valuations bring the value of the affected property into line with the general valuation of other properties within the municipality. Objections to supplementary valuations can be lodged in accordance with Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960.* Any objections must be lodged with Council within two months of the issue of the supplementary rate notice.

Objections to property valuations

Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* provides that a property owner may lodge an objection against the valuation of a property or the Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) within two months of the issue of the original or amended (supplementary) Rates and Valuation Charges Notice (Rates Notice), or within four months if the notice was not originally issued to the occupier of the land.

A property owner must lodge their objection to the valuation or the AVPCC in writing to the Melton City Council. Property owners also have the ability to object to the site valuations on receipt of their Land Tax Assessment. Property owners can appeal their land valuation within two months of receipt of their Council Rate Notice (via Council) or within two months of receipt of their Land Tax Assessment (via the State Revenue Office).

1.4.4 RATING DIFFERENTIALS

Council believes each differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of council functions. Details of the objectives of each differential rate, the classes of land which are subject to each differential rate and the uses of each differential rate are set out below.

<u>General Rate</u>

Definition:

General Rate is any land which does not have the characteristics of:

1. Vacant Land;
2. Extractive Industry Land;
3. Commercial/Industrial Developed Land;
4. Commercial/Industrial Vacant Land;
5. Retirement Village Land;
6. Rural Living Land;
7. Rural Land; or
8. Urban Growth Land.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services; and
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district.

Characteristics:

Residential Land on which a building is erected and the site is approved for occupation by the issue of an occupancy certificate and the site is available or used for residential purposes.

Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

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Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

100% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

<u>Vacant Land Rate</u>

Definition:

Vacant Land is any land:

1. on which no building with an approved occupancy permit is erected; and
2. located in a precinct structure plan, and with an approved planning permit for residential subdivision; and
3. which does not have the characteristics of:
   - 3.1 Commercial/Industrial Vacant Land;
   - 3.2 Rural Living Land;
   - 3.3 Rural Land; or
   - 3.4 Urban Growth Land.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to encourage the development of land for non-commercial and non-industrial purposes, and ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services; and
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district; and
6. To discourage land banking, and ensure an adequate supply of residential zoned land to the market demand

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

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Level of Rate:

170% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Extractive Rate

Definition:

Extractive Industry Land is any land which is:

4. used primarily for the extraction or removal of stone, including the treatment of stone; and
5. located within a Special Use Zone 1 under the Melton Planning Scheme.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services; and
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district.

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

288% of the General Rate. Maximum allowed, four times of the lowest rate being the Rural Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

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Commercial/Industrial Developed Rate

Definition:

Commercial/Industrial Developed land is any land which:

6. is used or adapted or designed to be used primarily for commercial or industrial purposes; or
7. does not have the characteristics of Extractive Industry Land.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, having regard to the capacity of such land to be used to yield income and the demands such land make on Council's infrastructure. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services; and
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district.

Characteristics:

Commercial/Industrial Land on which a building is erected and the site is approved for occupation by the issue of an occupancy certificate and the site is or used for commercial/industrial purposes.

Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

160% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

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Commercial/Industrial Vacant Rate

Definition:

Commercial/Industrial Vacant Land is any land:

8. on which no building with an approved occupancy permit is erected; and
9. which is located within:
    - 9.1 a Business 1 Zone;
    - 9.2 a Comprehensive Development Zone;
    - 9.3 a Mixed Use Zone;
    - 9.4 an Industrial Zone 1;
    - 9.5 an Industrial Zone 3;
    - 9.6 Special Use Zone 4;
    - 9.7 Special Use Zone 3;
    - 9.8 Special Use Zone 6;
    - 9.9 Special Use Zone 7; or
    - 9.10 Urban Growth Zone located in a precinct structure plan, and with an approved planning permit for commercial/industrial use.

under the Melton Planning Scheme

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to encourage the commercial/industrial development and ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services; and
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district; and
6. To discourage land banking, and ensure an adequate supply of commercial/industrial zoned land to the market demand

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

225% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

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Retirement Village Rate

Definition:

Retirement Village Land is any land which is located within a retirement village land under the Retirement Villages Act 1986.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services;
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district; and
6. Recognition of the services undertaken by the retirement village sector.

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

85% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Rural Living Rate

Definition:

Rural Living Land is any land which is:

10. two (2) or more hectares but less than ten (10) hectares in area; and
11. located within:
    - 11.1 a Green Wedge A Zone;
    - 11.2 a Green Wedge Zone;
    - 11.3 a Rural Conservation Zone;
    - 11.4 a Farming Zone; or
    - 11.5 Special Use Zone 5.

    under the Melton Planning Scheme.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services;
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district; and
6. To assist in the maintenance of rural properties.

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

90% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

<u>Rural Rate</u>

Definition:

Rural Land is any land which is:

12. ten (10) hectares or more in area; and
13. located within:
    - 13.1 a Green Wedge A Zone;
    - 13.2 a Green Wedge Zone;
    - 13.3 a Rural Conservation Zone;
    - 13.4 a Farming Zone; or
    - 13.5 Special Use Zone 5.

    under the Melton Planning Scheme.

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Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services;
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district;
6. To recognise the impact of urban land speculation on the valuation of farm land; and
7. To encourage agricultural activity.

Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

72% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

<u>Urban Growth Rate</u>

Definition:

Urban Growth Land is any land which is:

14. two (2) or more hectares in area; and
15. located within an Urban Growth Zone under the Melton Planning Scheme in respect of which no precinct structure plan has been approved.

Objectives:

The objective of this differential is to ensure that such rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, having regard to the capacity of such land to be developed (or future developed) and the demands that such land make on Council's infrastructure. These include the:

1. Implementation of good governance and sound financial stewardship: and
2. Construction, renewal, upgrade, expansion and maintenance of infrastructure assets; and
3. Development and provision of health, environmental, conservation, leisure, recreation, youth and family community services; and
4. Provision of strategic and economic management, town planning and general support services;
5. Promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism aspects of Council's municipal district; and
6. Planning & preparation of Precinct Structure Plan.

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Characteristics, Types and Classes:

The types and classes of rateable land within this differential are those having the relevant characteristics described above.

Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

Level of Rate:

80% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Melton City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Advantages of a differential rating system

The advantages of utilising a differential rating system summarised below are:

- There is greater flexibility to distribute the rate burden between all classes of property, and therefore link rates with the ability to pay and reflecting the tax deductibility of rates for commercial and industrial premises.
- Differential rating allows Council to better reflect the investment required by Council to establish infrastructure to meet the needs of the commercial and industrial sector.
- Allows Council to reflect the unique circumstances of some rating categories where the application of a uniform rate may create an inequitable outcome (e.g. Farming enterprises).
- Allows Council discretion in the imposition of rates to facilitate and encourage appropriate development of its municipal district in the best interest of the community. (i.e. Vacant Commercial properties still attract the commercial differential rate)

Disadvantages of a differential rating system

The disadvantages in applying differential rating summarised below are:

- The justification of the differential rate can at times be difficult for the various groups to accept giving rise to queries and complaints where the differentials may seem to be excessive.
- Differential rates can be confusing to ratepayers, as they may have difficulty understanding the system. Some rating categories may feel they are unfavourably treated because they are paying a higher level of rates than other ratepayer groups.
- Differential rating involves a degree of administrative complexity as properties continually shift from one type to another (e.g. residential to commercial,) requiring Council to update its records. Ensuring the accuracy/integrity of Council's data base is critical to ensure that properties are correctly classified into their right category.
- Council may not achieve the objectives it aims for through differential rating. For example, Council may set its differential rate objectives to levy a higher rate on land not developed, however it may be difficult to prove whether the rate achieves those objectives.

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1.4.5 MUNICIPAL CHARGE

Another principle rating option available to Councils is the application of a municipal charge. Under Section 159 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may declare a municipal charge to cover some of the administrative costs of the Council. The legislation is not definitive on what comprises administrative costs and does not require Council to specify what is covered by the charge.

The application of a municipal charge represents a choice to raise a portion of the rates by a flat fee for all properties, rather than sole use of the CIV valuation method.

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, a council's total revenue from a municipal charge in a financial year must not exceed 20 per cent of the combined sum total of the Council's total revenue from the municipal charge and the revenue from general rates (total rates).

The municipal charge applies equally to all properties and is based upon the recovery of a fixed cost of providing administrative services irrespective of valuation. The same contribution amount per assessment to cover a portion of Council's administrative costs can be seen as an equitable method of recovering these costs.

1.4.6 SPECIAL CHARGE SCHEMES

The *Local Government Act 1989* recognises that councils need help to provide improved infrastructure for their local communities. Legislation allows councils to pass on the cost of capital infrastructure to the owner of a property that generally receives a unique benefit from the construction works. The technical explanation of a Special Charge comes from legislation (under the *Local Government Act 1989*) that allows councils to recover the cost of works from property owners who will gain special benefit from that work.

The purposes for which special rates and special charges may be used include road construction, kerb and channelling, footpath provision, drainage, and other capital improvement projects.

The special rate or special charges may be declared on the basis of any criteria specified by the council in the rate (Section 163 (2). In accordance with Section 163 (3), council must specify:

a. the wards, groups, uses or areas for which the special rate or charge is declared; and
b. the land in relation to which the special rate or special charge is declared;
c. the manner in which the special rate or special charge will be assessed and levied; and
d. details of the period for which the special rate or special charge remains in force.

The special rates and charges provisions are flexible and can be used to achieve a wide range of community objectives. The fundamental principle of special rates and charges is proof "special benefit" applies to those being levied. For example, they could be used to fund co-operative fire prevention schemes. This would ensure that there were no 'free-riders' reaping the benefits but not contributing to fire prevention.

Landscaping and environmental improvement programs that benefit small or localised areas could also be funded using special rates or charges.

1.4.7 SERVICE RATES AND CHARGES

Section 162 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides council with the opportunity to raise service rates and charges for any of the following services:

a. The provision of a water supply;
b. The collection and disposal of refuse;
c. The provision of sewage services;
d. Any other prescribed service.

Council currently applies a service charge for the collection and disposal of kerbside waste services for the municipality. Council retains the objective of setting the service charge for waste at a level that significantly recovers the cost of kerbside waste services.

It is recommended that council retain the existing waste service charge – should council elect not to have a waste service charge, this same amount would be required to be raised by way of an increased general rate – meaning that residents in higher valued properties would substantially pay for the waste service of lower valued properties.

Whilst this same principle applies for rates in general, the mix of having a single fixed charge combined with valuation driven rates for the remainder of the rate invoice provides a balanced and equitable outcome.

1.4.8 REBATES

Section 169 of the *Local Government Act 1989* allows a Council to grant a rebate or concession in relation to any rate or charge under different circumstances.

Council provides two rebates on rates and charges. Council also acts as the managing agent on behalf of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing in relation to the municipal rates concession available to eligible pension card holders.
The two rebates currently offered by Council are additional pensioner rebate and environmental enhancement rebate.

Additional Pensioner Rebate

Council provide an additional rebate to eligible pension card holders on top of the amount provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Environmental Enhancement Rebate

Eligible owners of a property larger than two hectares (approximately five acres), will be able to receive a rebate on their rates if they meet the requirements of the Environmental Enhancement Rate Rebate Policy. Land that has an approved Planning Permit for Subdivision is ineligible and the Rural Rate Rebate does not apply.
The policy includes controlling:

- noxious and environmental weeds
- pest animals, especially the European Rabbit
- soil erosion and other damaging processes

The following discount applies to the General Rates:

- Rural Living – 25%
- Rural – 50%
- Urban Growth Zone with no Precinct Structure Plan - 25%
- Urban Growth Zone with an approved Precinct Structure Plan -25%

Municipal Rates Concession (DFFH/DVA)

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Veterans Affairs provide a rebate to offset Council rates & charges to eligible pension card holders. These rebates are managed and maintained by Council. The application of these rebates on eligible properties are then collated and submitted to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing on a quarterly basis, and reimbursement is provided to Council thereafter.

1.4.9 COLLECTION AND ADMINISTRATION OF RATES AND CHARGES

The purpose of this section is to outline the rate payment options, processes, and the support provided to ratepayers facing financial hardship.

Payment options

In accordance with section 167(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* ratepayers have the option of paying rates and charges by way of four instalments. Payments are due on the prescribed dates below:

- 1st Instalment: 30 September
- 2nd Instalment: 30 November
- 3rd Instalment: 28 February
- 4th Instalment: 31 May

Council offers a range of payment options including:

- in person at Council offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS, credit/debit cards and cash),
- online via Council's website,
- Direct Debit (on prescribed instalment due dates, weekly, fortnightly or monthly),
- BPAY,
- Phone,
- Australia Post (over the counter, credit cards not accepted),
- by mail (cheques and money orders only).
- Centrepay

Interest on arrears and overdue rates

Interest is charged on all overdue rates in accordance with Section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The interest rate applied is fixed under Section 2 of the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*, which is determined by the Minister and published by notice in the Government Gazette.

Pensioner rebates

Holders of a Centrelink or Veteran Affairs Pension Concession card or a Veteran Affairs Gold card which stipulates TPI or War Widow may claim a rebate on their sole or principal place of residence. Upon initial application, ongoing eligibility is maintained, unless rejected by Centrelink or the Department of Veteran Affairs during the annual verification procedure. Upon confirmation of an eligible pensioner concession status, the pensioner rebate is deducted from the rate account before payment is required by the ratepayer.

With regards to new applicants, after being granted a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), pensioners can then apply for the rebate at any time throughout the rating year. Retrospective claims up to a maximum of one previous financial year can be approved by Council on verification of eligibility criteria, for periods prior to this claims may be approved by the relevant government department.

Deferred payments

Under Section 170 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may defer the payment of any rate or charge for an eligible ratepayer whose property is their sole place of residency, allowing ratepayers an extended period of time to make payments or alternatively to forestall payments on an indefinite basis until the ratepayer ceases to own or occupy the land in respect of which rates and charges are to be levied.

Deferral of rates and charges are available to all ratepayers who satisfy the eligibility criteria and have proven financial difficulties. Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to apply on Council's website or contact Council.

Financial Assistance (Rates & Charges) Policy

It is acknowledged at the outset that various ratepayers may experience financial hardship for a whole range of issues and that meeting rate obligations constitutes just one element of a number of difficulties that may be faced. The purpose of the Financial Assistance (Rates & Charges) Policy is to provide options for ratepayers facing such situations to deal with the situation positively and reduce the strain imposed by financial hardship.

Ratepayers may elect to either negotiate a rate payment plan or apply for a rate deferral. Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to apply on Council's website or contact Council.

Debt recovery

Council makes every effort to contact ratepayers at their correct address but it is the ratepayers' responsibility to properly advise Council of their contact details. The *Local Government Act 1989* Section 230 and 231 requires both the vendor and buyer of property, or their agents (e.g. solicitors and or conveyancers), to notify Council by way of notice of acquisition of an interest in land.

In the event that an account becomes overdue, Council will issue a reminder notice which will include accrued penalty interest. Council will continue to try and contact ratepayers who are in arrears with legal action a last resort. In the event that the account remains unpaid after Council has exhausted collection efforts, Council may take legal action to recover the overdue amount. Certain fees and court costs incurred will be recoverable from the ratepayer.

If an amount payable by way of rates in respect to land has been in arrears for three years or more, Council may take action to sell the property in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* Section 181.

Fire Services Property Levy

In 2012 the Victorian State Government passed legislation requiring the Fire Services Property Levy to be collected from ratepayers. Previously this was collected through building and property insurance premiums. The Fire Services Property Levy helps fund the services provided by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country Fire Authority (CFA), and all levies collected by Council are passed through to the State Government.

The Fire Services Property Levy is based on two components, a fixed charge, and a variable charge which is linked to the Capital Improved Value of the property. This levy is not included in the rate cap and increases in the levy are at the discretion of the State Government.

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1.5 OTHER REVENUE ITEMS

1.5.1 USER FEES AND CHARGES

User fees and charges are those that Council will charge for the delivery of services and use of community infrastructure.

Examples of user fees and charges include:

- Kindergarten fees
- Pool visitation and membership fees
- Aged and Health Care service fees
- Leases and facility hire fees

The provision of infrastructure and services form a key part of council's role in supporting the local community. In providing these, council must consider a range of 'Best Value' principles including service cost and quality standards, value-for-money, and community expectations and values. Council must also balance the affordability and accessibility of infrastructure and services with its financial capacity and in the interests of long-term financial sustainability.

In providing services to the community, council must determine the extent of cost recovery for particular services consistent with the level of both individual and collective benefit that the services provide and in line with the community's expectations.

With regard to user fees and charges that are not regulated by statute, Council will consider the following guiding principles and factors in selecting the fees and charges pricing methodology. This will enable the Council to meet its objectives for the services to the community according to the Council plan.

- These guiding principles include:
    - Cost reflective pricing and future considerations
    - Community expectations and equity values
    - Service Performance principles
    - Compliance with the Competition and Consumer Act (CCA) 2010 and the National Competition Policy (NCP) requirements.

Cost Reflective Pricing, Equity and Future Considerations

Fees and charges have important implications for resource allocation and value for money for the community. Cost reflective pricing can help ensure the Council's resources are best utilised to meet its community needs. In adopting cost reflective pricing Council will consider a range of factors such as the income anticipated from the imposition of the charge, external grants and contributions, anticipated expenditure of service delivery and the administration cost of providing the service.

Equity considerations are also important factors impacting on Council pricing decisions. These are also relevant in determining the appropriate level of cost recovery for given services. This involves balancing the desire to distribute costs equally to users who benefit from the service while assuring equal access to those with less capacity to pay. These are often competing priorities, which can be further complicated by the need to make appropriate price adjustments to subsidise services to one group of ratepayers/customers at the expense of another.

Community Expectation or Values

Each community member or group clearly places a "value" or level of importance on the goods and services that the Council provides. This "value" will be dependent upon the strength of the benefits that it provides to the community member or a group. Other value considerations under this category will include balancing the Community's affordability and access to council services with cost and quality considerations

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Service Performance Principles

The Local Government Act 2020 also requires the Council to comply with the Service Performance principles:

- Achieve continuous improvement;
- Consultation on services; and
- Report to community.
- Value for money
- Equitable and accessable provision of services

Compliance with CCA and Competitive Neutrality

Councils must also comply with the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy (NCP) and Competition and Consumer Act (CCA) guidelines for significant business activities they provide and adjust their service prices to neutralise any competitive advantages when competing with the private sector.

Under Clause 3(1) of the Competition Principles Agreement, the objective of competitive neutrality is..."the elimination of resource allocation distortions arising out of the public ownership of entities engaged in significant business activities:

Government business should not enjoy any net competitive advantage simply as a result of their public sector ownership.

Services are provided on the basis of one of the following pricing methods:

a. Market Pricing
b. Full Cost Recovery Pricing
c. Subsidised or Accessible Pricing
d. Disincentive Pricing

Market pricing (A) is where council sets prices based on the benchmarked competitive prices of alternate suppliers. In general market price represents full cost recovery plus an allowance for a modest surplus. Market prices will be used when other providers exist in the given market, and council needs to meet its obligations under the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy.

Full cost recovery pricing (B) aims to recover all direct and indirect costs incurred by council. This pricing is used where a service provided by council benefits individual customers specifically (private benefit pricing), rather than the community as a whole. Fees and charges are generally set at a level that recovers the full cost of providing the services unless there is an overriding policy or imperative in favour of subsidisation.

Subsidised or Accessible pricing (C) is where council subsidises a service by not passing the full cost of that service onto the customer. Subsidies may range from full subsidies (i.e. council provides the service free of charge) to partial subsidies, where council provides the service to the user with a discount. The subsidy can be funded from council's rate revenue or other sources such as Commonwealth and State Government funding programs.

Disincentive pricing (D) This pricing regime will be adopted where the Council have an applicable policy objective that supports disincentive pricing or where the Council performs the role to regulate and restrict certain behaviour.

As per the Victorian Auditor General's Office report *"Fees and charges – cost recovery by local government"* recommendations, council has developed a user fee pricing policy to help guide the fair and equitable setting of prices. The policy outlines the process for setting fee prices and includes such principles as:

- Both direct and indirect costs to be taken into account when setting prices;
- Accessibility, affordability and efficient delivery of services must be taken into account; and
- Competitive neutrality with commercial providers.

Council develop a table of user fees and charges as part of its annual budget each year. Proposed pricing changes are included in this table.

1.5.2 STATUTORY FEES AND CHARGES

Statutory fees and fines are those which council collects under the direction of legislation or other government directives. The rates used for statutory fees and fines are generally advised by the state government department responsible for the corresponding services or legislation, and generally councils will have limited discretion in applying these fees.

Examples of statutory fees and fines include:

- Planning and subdivision fees
- Building and Inspection fees
- Infringements and fines
- Land Information Certificate fees

Penalty and fee units are used in Victoria's Acts and Regulations to describe the amount of a fine or a fee.

Penalty units

Penalty units are used to define the amount payable for fines for many offences. For example, the fine for selling a tobacco product to a person aged under 18 is four penalty units.

One penalty unit is currently $197.59, from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

The rate for penalty units is indexed each financial year so that it is raised in line with inflation. Any change to the value of a penalty unit will happen on 1 July each year.

Fee units

Fee units are used to calculate the cost of a certificate, registration or licence that is set out in an Act or Regulation. For example, the cost of depositing a Will with the supreme court registrar of probates is 1.6 fee units.

The value of one fee unit is currently $16.33. This value may increase at the beginning of a financial year, at the same time as penalty units.

The cost of fees and penalties is calculated by multiplying the number of units by the current value of the fee or unit. The exact cost may be rounded up or down.

1.5.3 GRANTS

Grant revenue represents income usually received from other levels of government. Some grants are singular and attached to the delivery of specific projects, whilst others can be of a recurrent nature and may or may not be linked to the delivery of projects.

Council will pro-actively advocate to other levels of government for grant funding support to deliver important infrastructure and service outcomes for the community. Council may use its own funds to leverage higher grant funding and maximise external funding opportunities.

When preparing its financial plan, Council considers its project proposal pipeline, advocacy priorities, upcoming grant program opportunities, and co-funding options to determine what grants to apply for. Council will only apply for and accept external funding if it is consistent with the Community Vision and does not lead to the distortion of Council Plan priorities.

Grant assumptions are then clearly detailed in Council's budget document. No project that is reliant on grant funding will proceed until a signed funding agreement is in place.

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1.5.4 CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions represent funds received by council, usually from non-government sources, and are usually linked to projects.

Contributions can be made to Council in the form of either cash payments or asset hand-overs.

Examples of contributions include:

- Monies collected from developers under planning and development agreements
- Monies collected under developer contribution plans and infrastructure contribution plans
- Contributions from user groups towards upgrade of facilities
- Assets handed over to council from developers at the completion of a subdivision, such as roads, drainage, and streetlights.

Contributions should always be linked to a planning or funding agreement. Council will not undertake any work on a contribution-funded project until a signed agreement outlining the contribution details is in place.

Contributions linked to developments can be received well before any council expenditure occurs. In this situation, the funds will be identified and held separately for the specific works identified in the agreements.

1.5.5 INTEREST ON INVESTMENTS

Council receives interest on funds managed as part of its investment portfolio, where funds are held in advance of expenditure, or for special purposes. The investment portfolio is managed per council's investment policy, which seeks to earn the best return on funds, whilst minimising risk.

1.5.6 BORROWINGS

Whilst not a source of income, borrowings can be an important cash management tool in appropriate circumstances. Loans can only be approved by council resolution. The following financial sustainability principles are adhered to with new borrowings:

- Borrowings must only be applied for where it can be proven that repayments can be met in the Financial Plan
- Borrowings must not be used to fund ongoing operations
- Borrowings are appropriate for funding large capital works where the benefits are provided to future generations.
- Council will maintain its debt at levels which are sustainable, with:
    - indebtedness <60% of rate and charges revenue, and
    - debt servicing cost <5% of total revenue (excluding capital revenue).

1.5.7 SERVICE PLANNING

Council in 2020 undertook a service planning exercise where all Council services both internal and external where defined and costed. Council also projected the cost of these services over a 10 year period along with the income/revenue generated from various sources. Council over the course of this Revenue and Rating Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 will continue to review its fees and charges, implement strategies to diversify its income streams and review respective pricing strategies based on service planning outcomes. This will assist in ensuring long term financial sustainability and reduce reliance on rates income in a rating capping environment.

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