



District Council
of Cooper Pedy

CommunityNewsletter

November/December 2022

www.cooperpedy.sa.gov.au

welcome to the opal capital of the world



From the Administrator

Farewell and greetings of the season

This is my last newsletter. As previously advised, I made a decision over 12 months ago to advise the State Government that I was not available if the Government decided that the Council would continue to be overseen by an administrator.

The issues confronting Cooper Pedy presented me with one of my greatest career challenges. At times it has been traumatic but overall it has been rewarding in terms of the amount of progress made.

The Council has been stabilised and we have developed a number of scenarios for the State Government to consider which will ensure the financial sustainability of the Council.

Pleasingly, all our commercial businesses are now operating at break-even or at a profit. Our municipal and town activities need a significant injection of revenue (see later) but this will only be possible if the State Government introduces water pricing parity in Cooper Pedy.

A State of the Council report is being produced which will provide a 'warts and all' assessment of the Council (refer later).

Would I have liked to have achieved more? Absolutely yes.

Have I been frustrated by the slowness of the State Government decision making? Absolutely yes. The water price parity issue (see later) was raised with the State Government in November 2019!

We have set the Council on a sustainable course. I thank you for putting your trust in me and I sincerely wish the town and its citizens a prosperous future. I also wish you all a festive and safe Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Administrator

As previously advised the State Government has decided to continue with an Administrator possibly until November 2026. The State Government is considering more than one Administrator due to the complexity of issues. I would question the need for this. The role/s were advertised nationally in early November. I have agreed to stay on until the end of January. If someone is not identified by then it will be necessary for the State Government to make an interim appointment. The State Government will make an announcement in due course.

Annual report

Councils are required to report annually on their activities. In the case of Cooper Pedy this has not been done since 2014/2015. The report for the year ended 30 June 2022 is available on the Council's website or by calling in at the Council Office.

Banking service

Westpac has announced it will be closing its Cooper Pedy branch in February next year. This is devastating news for the town particularly one as remote as Cooper Pedy. This is occurring at an alarming rate across regional Australia. There are moves afoot at Federal Government level to create an Australia Post Bank, but if this occurred it would be some years away. The Council is heavily involved in these efforts.

In the meantime, Council has asked Westpac to delay the closure to enable time to make the best possible alternative arrangements.

The Business Association, *Cooper Pedy Together*, the Miners Association, Umoona Community Council and the District Council have come together to plot a way forward. In the short to medium term this would involve predominantly banking through the Post Office.

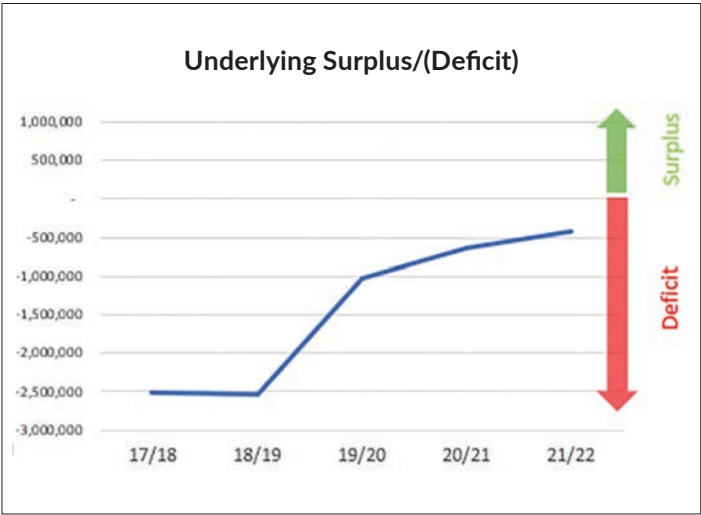


➔ **Financial result**

The Council is required by the Local Government Act to produce financial statements annually. They are required to be independently audited.

The result for the 2021/2022 financial year continued the significant improvement over recent years with an underlying operating deficit of \$418k. This was however worse than the original budgeted result.

The graph below shows the movement in the underlying result in recent years.



As can be seen the underlying result initially improved significantly but has now plateaued which will only be improved by the State Government and the Council taking joint action regarding municipal rate and water price levels.

Pleasingly the independent audit of the Council's financial statements was unqualified. Disappointingly, the Council's internal controls were again qualified. This is primarily due to a lack of resources and competing interests. This will be rectified by 30 June 2023.

Future provision of municipal and essential services

As previously advised the Council in June this year wrote to The Minister for Local Government regarding its views on this subject.

The State Government in response to the Council's letter has established a taskforce to deal with issues raised by the Council due to their complexity.

They are issues that only the State Government can solve. Unfortunately, the taskforce did not have its first meeting until November.

The Council has written to the Minister for Local Government seeking an urgent meeting to stress the importance of the State Government making a decision regarding water before the end of March 2023. This action has strong support from Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

The issue of water pricing equity was first raised with the State Government in November 2019. Since then, Coober Pedy water consumers have paid \$5 million more in water charges than if they lived in Adelaide. THEY FEEL LIKE THY ARE BEING TREATED LIKE SECOND CLASS CITIZENS.

Councils are required to have a long-term financial plan. We have had one since early in the term of the Administrator. This has helped guide and drive the significant turnaround in the Council's finances.

The Council has developed a draft long term financial plan with five scenarios regarding future responsibility for electricity and water. All scenarios return the Council to financial sustainability with the exception of the scenario which gifts the electricity and water assets to the State Government.

National Outback Film Centre

Coober Pedy has a long history of being a location for film making. The Council in conjunction with the SA Tourism Commission has funded a study regarding the feasibility of establishing a National Outback Film Centre in Coober Pedy. The work has been awarded to Fyfe and has commenced. It will look at the creation of a film 'museum' and a film-making logistics centre and service. Consultation with the community will occur early next year. A project steering committee comprised of the Business Association, SA Tourism Commission and the Council has been formed.



Q&A

Just a reminder that you can pose questions to the Council on any subject within its sphere of responsibility by either coming along, either in person or online, to the Council meeting on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7pm or by submitting your questions in writing prior to the meeting. The more notice of the questions the more likely you will get an answer at the meeting.

State of the Council Report

A State of the Council Report is being prepared by the Council. It will provide a 'warts and all' assessment of the Council. It will be an important document for the incoming Administrator. It will also be available to citizens.

There is no next time.

Tim Jackson, Administrator, 0417 016 161





CEO Update

Since the last newsletter, much has been happening with the District Council of Coober Pedy (DCCP).

DCCP is involved in numerous community initiatives. In addition to those mention in the Administrator's Report, we are about to select a consultant to conduct a Master Plan project for the Outback Open Air Cinema (Drive-in) to develop a long-term plan including refurbishment of the building and site.

Once the Master Plan has been presented, the Drive-in and Council will collaborate to seek funding to hopefully bring the plan to life.

Our first round of our Community Grants program commenced and all applications have been reviewed by the Evaluation Committee. We will be in touch with all applicants shortly and will be funding some important initiatives. We also have announced a grants program with grants up to \$500 at the CEO's discretion. Our first minor grant has been awarded to Dusty Radio.

We embarked upon a potential project that would have rejuvenated the old 'Town Hall' and had an organisation provide a number of community services, however that project now has been discontinued.

We continue to focus on our culture and making DCCP a better place to work. As part of this, we conducted our second Employee Engagement Survey. Key to this was reviewing this year's responses to last year's. Overall, the results were very pleasing, with 37 items more favourable to last year and seven items less favourable. We are in the process of briefing the Executive Leadership Team, then the Extended Leadership Team and, finally, all staff. Key actions will be implemented to ensure we keep doing what we are doing well and do better where improvement is necessary.

A team of staff is re-visiting our Vision, Mission and Values and will conclude this important work in the New Year.

A very important initiative was our Work, Health and Safety (WHS) audit by external auditors. We have much to do and have begun in earnest.

DCCP has a variety of positions vacant presently and I would encourage people, especially locals, to apply.

In closing, I take this opportunity to thank all our staff for all their efforts and to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and very best wishes for the New Year.

David Kelly, Chief Executive Officer



Council Christmas closure

The District Council of Coober Pedy wishes everyone a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

Council advises the community of the following office and service closures during the festival season:

- **Council Chambers/Civic Building:** Closed from 5pm Thursday 22 December 2022, reopens 9am Tuesday 3 January 2023.
- **Council Works Depot:** Closed from 3:30pm Thursday 22 December 2022, reopens 7:30am Tuesday 3 January 2023.

- **Waste Depot/Dump:** Normal hours (12:45pm to 3:45pm Monday/Wednesday/Friday and 9am to 1pm Saturday. Closed public holidays and if the temperature exceeds 38°C.).
- **Visitor Information Centre:** Closed for the off-peak tourist season, reopens on 1 March 2023.

On-call numbers (in case of emergency):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| • Electricity On-Call Operator | 0417 814 617 |
| • Water On-Call Operator | 0417 811 470 |
| • Works | 0400 108 230 |

Connecting together as one community



Human beings are hardwired for connection, belonging, and safety. If we find these things, we grow and we thrive. If we don't find them, things can go off track very quickly. In a community change initiative or movement like *Coober Pedy Together*, these three things are essential. Yes, *Coober Pedy Together* works on a range of other strategies and activities, as guided by the community workshops and conversations, but at its heart, it's about connecting us together, helping us all find a place to belong, and creating a sense of long-term safety and security.

A Coober Pedy Christmas took place at the Croatian Club on Saturday 26 November. It was a huge day for the community, with over 400 people attending across the event. It was so good to see all ages and groups from throughout the community just being present together.



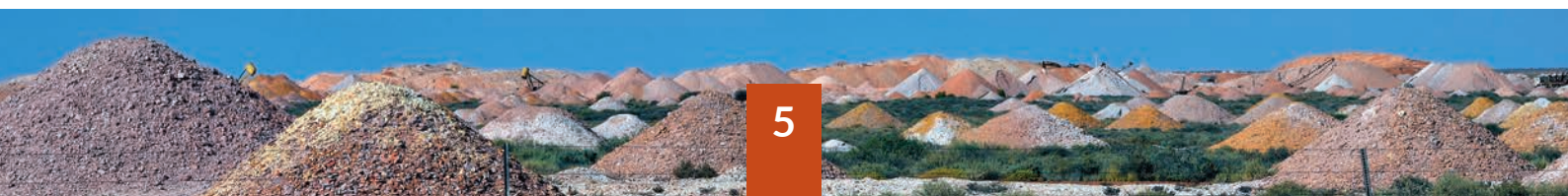


Connecting together as one community

There were a whole range of market stalls, from plants to crafts, to a range of different gifts, to home-made food, and even more. The Croatian Club put on a mouth-watering spit and salads, with other alternative foods available. Food brings people together in more ways than one.

Children and families had a blast. There was so much to do. The jumping castle was a hit, and something not seen in the community for a little while. Fairy floss and popcorn were running out the door, and balloon animals were on offer. The event also featured an amazing children's activity corner with so many different activities, from making your own decorations, to blowing bubbles, to decorating gingerbread, to choosing your own adventure or activity.

Members of the community were able to cast votes for both the Christmas tree and lights and decorations competitions across the night. Well done to all the winners and thank you for all the efforts that many members of the community made to add a little bit of Christmas across the town.





Connecting together as one community



We received a very special phone call from the Santa himself, telling us that he was on his way to the event. The crowd of children and families ran outside to watch Santa arrive on top of the CFS truck, with a full escort by SA Police and SES/Mine Rescue. Santa even brought his friends Elf and Tree along to meet everyone. It was a time of great joy and crazy fun watching all the children and families meet Santa and receive a Christmas gift.

Thank you so much to all the people who helped make sure that Santa arrived safely to the event, and that he had a ride home afterwards.

It was then time for Carols by Candlelight or Glowstick. A choir came together from across the community and led the event in singing a range of carols and songs.

It was wonderful to see a group of local children perform a special song for the community, and to sit and reflect together.

The final activity for the night was to draw the big Christmas raffle. Well done to all the winners. Many activities were free, but the event was also raising money for the new benches in the community playground, with \$2,947 raised. This event is a great example of bringing the community together, and creating a sense of connection, belonging and safety.

Coober Pedy Together held a community workshop on Sunday 11 December, and have begun working together with the community to prioritise actions and activities for 2023. *Coober Pedy Together* is so grateful to the whole community for their support in 2022 and looks forward to continuing the work into the new year.



Coober Pedy Miners Association Inc. update

The 2022 Annual General Meeting of the Coober Pedy Miners Association took place in October.

A new committee was elected, consisting of:

- Isabella Jones (President)
- Secretary (Emily Pennisi)
- Treasurer (Brett Smith)
- Corey Edwards
- Daniel Measey
- Max Jones
- Frank Tsianos
- Sebastian Crisa
- Matthew Graham
- Ivan Jelcic

The purpose of the Association is to support the opal miners and opal industry in Coober Pedy.

Since being elected, the first action of the Association was to arrange the grading of the access road that runs parallel to the Stuart Highway.

The funds to enable this to occur were provided by the Council.

The focus of the new committee has been to establish a strategic plan for the next two years.

The current draft plan includes:

- Sourcing ongoing recurrent funding to regularly grade the primary access and arterial roads throughout the opal fields to improve access for all miners and reduce wear and tear on plant and machinery.
- Determine the future of the Association's prospecting drill.
- Re-establishing a drilling program for the purposes of finding a new field.
- Reinvigorating the Coober Pedy Gem Trade Show.



- Strengthening the relationship and communications with government including the Department of Energy and Mining (ie. Coober Pedy Mines Dept), AusIndustry, Department for Trade and Investment, Austrade and SafeworkSA).
- Assessing and testing recent theories on discovering shallow opal bearing ground.

The Coober Pedy Miners Association has also been working in partnership with local police to address ratters night-shifting in the opal fields. The Coober Pedy Miners Association extends their sincere appreciation to SAPOL for their support.

Farewell Dayna!



Council is seeing the departure of Dayna Fitzgerald from the team to re-join her young family in Sydney.

Dayna has been a Revenue Officer for just under a year.

Prior to working with Council, she was well known around town for her beautiful coffees at the bakery and her friendly

disposition. Her exceptional customer service and can-do attitude at the bakery was why she won the position at Council.

Dayna is a very fast learner and dedicated employee who swiftly became an essential part of the team.

If you have dealt with Dayna at Council, you would know she does her best to help people and will make sure every query is answered in a timely manner.

She helped develop new policies, procedures and improved systems.

Dayna has made the team feel even more like a family with the humour and great mood that she brings to the office every day. Council would like to thank Dayna for her hard work, dedication and resilience.

Thank you so much Dayna! We wish all the very best for you, Simote, Koppe and Leka as you embark on your next life adventure!

Mini Gems event newsletter

Mini Gems held three successful events in December.

On 15 December, we hosted a Christmas Party and all the Mini Gems children, and the educator dressed up as Christmas outfits and came in.

After the breakfast, the children got Christmas face painting by one of the educators and they paused and were taken photos next to the Christmas Tree.

Soon after, Santa with his helper came to visit Mini Gems escorted by Coober Pedy Country Fire Service (CFS), which we thank.

During lunch, the families joined our children after lunch the children participated in a Christmas dance party together.



Before afternoon teatime, they decorated their gingerbread men with icing. After decorating their cookies, they had fruits with gingerbread men cookies.

Late afternoon the children watched Christmas movie, *If You Give a Mouse a Christmas Cookie Movie*.

We held the Mini Gems Open Day on Saturday 17 December, welcoming families from the community. We set up a different experiences and activities, such as climbing flames with soft blocks, painting corner, play-dough activity and sensory tuff tray. Also, we provided healthy snacks such as a variety of fruits, biscuits and fruit juice.

Families also met and greeted the educators, and were briefed about our capabilities.

On Monday 19 December, as an extension to the Mini Gems Open Day event, we put on a Drumming Monkey Music show at the school gym. Lots of children and their families enjoyed the show. Before the show started, the children were already excited to see the monkeys.

The children and their families interacted with the monkeys and participated in playing music using drumming monkeys' drums and dancing. They showed their amusement using whole bodies.

After the show, each family and their children had a chance to take photos with the monkeys.



Cross-departmental visits

For the purpose of developing organisational culture, Council recently commenced interdepartmental visits so that employees can gain a greater understanding of the day-to-day activities of their colleagues in other departments.

In November, the Water Operations Department hosted a visit by the Chambers Team.

Neither department can operate in a silo, they are all interlinked.

The Water Operations Department produces and reticulates the water whilst the Finance, Revenue and Administration Team sends out the water bills and receives the funds which is then used to fund the Water Operations Department.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative morning for all involved.

Many thanks to Jamie, Gavin, Ben, Clayton, Damon, Jarod and Jake for being such gracious hosts and imparting their wealth of knowledge on the method and challenges of providing potable water to our remote community.



Water Department update



The main highlights for the year with water are as follows:

- Department reached full staff capacity – Manager, Supervisor, Team leader, x3 Operators and a Trainee.
- The department is entirely staffed by long-term community locals with a drive to provide safe and reliable service to the community.
- The department has successfully reduced the number of leak occurrences in the network by 95% in comparison to the previous financial year.
- Current figures show a reduction of around 20% volume of water 'lost' in the network when compared to last year.
- All water employees completed various courses with TAFE, with the most recent being Traffic Management.
- We have been shifting our maintenance model from a reactive maintenance program to a preventative maintenance program.
- We have been working heavily on the water tender and water business development this year with great success, approaching completion.
- We currently service 1556 residential and business properties within the township.
- Near 95% reduction in service provision complaints relating to water services.

Jamie Hay, Manager – Water Operations

Works Department update

In the last couple of months, We have been expanding our relationship with DIT. We did restorative grading work on William Creek Road. It is not a great earner, but it returns some capital to the Council and will grow to other specified task areas. It is good to feel an expanding confidence in the Council's reliability relationships with the wider community.

We surfaced Umoona Health yard with bitumen and gravel. It became a fine job by the boys, and blisters and sore backs were part and parcel of the day's work, but it is a job well done. The job returned good capital to the Council as well

We have Leif Tanzer working in the shed getting major works done on the 2nd grader and various other machines requiring repairs. We are in a difficult position now with some minor plant being pensioned out, some unsafe, some too old. The Works Department would like to take the opportunity to wish everyone a happy and pleasant Christmas and all the best in the new year.

We are aware there are situations not resolved but we hope to pursue them in the new year, and hope that we get better levels of community satisfaction going forward.

John Whittaker, Works Manager



Electricity Supply update

The Electricity Supply has started improving the street lighting in Coober Pedy to LED, which means brighter light, less maintenance and more energy efficiency.

The Electricity Supply has also upgraded most of the Low Voltage Switching equipment to make switching operations more efficient.

This year Council had two Lineperson apprentices complete their training with Council.

Council is currently looking at putting on more apprentices for both Lineperson and Electrician.

Brett Gardiner, Manager – Electricity Distribution



**District Council
of Coober Pedy**

Service contact numbers

**Administration
Office**
(08) 8672 4600

**Mini Gems
Children's Centre**
(08) 8672 4623

Library
(08) 8672 4635

**Electricity, Water,
Works Depot**
(08) 8672 4626

On-call numbers

Aerodrome
0400 108 230

Dog Control
0408 693 672

Electricity
0417 814 617

Water
0417 811 470

Works
0417 813 571