



District Council of Coober Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/August 2021

From the Administrator

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep the people of Coober Pedy informed about what the Council is doing and how we are spending ratepayers money. It is also to provide a place where the community can share stories, events, and find out about what different groups and organisations are up to. For example, I attended this year's AGM of the Coober Pedy Mine Rescue/ State Emergency Service. The AGM was extremely well run and Anthony Daelman was elected as Unit Manager. On behalf of the community, I thanked members, who are volunteers, for providing a much needed service to not only Coober Pedy but the Far North.

In this edition you will find information that includes the recently released Ombudsman's report in respect of the Council's past billing practices. The Council unreservedly apologises to the Aboriginal community for these practices.

Also in this edition you will find the Council's Annual Business Plan adopted at its meeting on 3 August 2021 following community consultation. The Plan sets out what the Council intends to achieve over the next year. The most significant issue raised during community consultation was proposed new borrowings. The Council's proposes to borrow an amount of \$2.65 million to mostly fund the elimination of the amount owed to its electricity supplier. This transaction will save the Council money as the interest rate payable will be significantly less than what it currently pays on the amount owed.

On August 2, the second Coober Pedy Roundtable was held. The Roundtable is a meeting of the Federal Member, Rowan Ramsay, the State Member, Eddie Hughes, and myself. It occurs every six months and its purpose is to monitor the progress of the town from all perspectives. Most issues require the three levels of government and business, both for profit and not for profit, to work together. Details of what was discussed and decided can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Since the appointment of the Administrator, the primary focus has been about stabilising Council particularly from a financial and governance perspective. A recent survey of employee attitudes revealed a number of matters requiring improvement. They are organisational culture, leadership and workplace health and safety. A number of measures have been identified by our CEO to address these issues. The CEO Oversight Committee is happy with what is proposed. On a positive note, there were a number of results Council is happy with. Progress will be monitored by subsequent surveys.

Finally as part of its annual business planning process, the Council has set aside \$25k to investigate the feasibility of establishing a National Outback Film Centre/Museum in Coober Pedy. The project has primarily a tourism focus which builds on the long history of film making in Coober Pedy. A possible secondary focus is business and employment creation associated with future film making in Coober Pedy and the Far North. The South Australian Tourism Commission has become a partner in the project by committing \$10 thousand. The next step is to engage an individual/organisation to undertake the feasibility study.

Until next time.

Tim Jackson
Administrator
0417 016 161





District Council of Cooper Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/ August 2021

Ombudsman SA Report

On 23 August 2021, the Ombudsman released a redacted report into his investigation of Council's historic billing practices. The trigger for the investigation was a complaint in 2018 from the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement on behalf of Aboriginal people into Council's electricity and water billing practices.

The Ombudsman found that the current administration *"inherited a legacy of previous practices that mishandled debts, failed to properly identify financial hardship circumstances, and failed to engage community members with payment arrangements that were realistic or focussed on the individual's financial circumstances."* Of particular concern to the Ombudsman is the substantial breakdown of trust between the Council and community members based on many years of limited transparency and clarity about the state of their debts, with catastrophic financial implications. The Ombudsman found that Council had:

- breached its license conditions;
- acted in a manner that appears contrary to law;
- acted in a manner that was wrong by failing to inform customers of the impact of any payments made under a Hardship Agreement; and
- contravened hardship policies.

Council acknowledges, and is sorry for, the harm and mistrust caused by its past billing practices, is committed to implementing all of the recommendations in the report, and welcomes all community input as to how we can move forward together.

The Ombudsman made seven recommendations to address these issues, noting that there is 'no quick fix' to this situation. He also acknowledged the *"many encouraging steps that the new administration has taken to remedy a number of errors identified in the investigation"*, and the *"difficult position in managing the fallout from a council placed into involuntary administration"*.

Council has undertaken a major review of its debt management policies and written off a significant amount of electricity debt in the 2020-21 financial year. However, there is still much more to do, including cultural awareness training for all employees, the provision of more information to customers particularly in relation to hardship, and the creation of an Aboriginal Engagement Plan. Council will continue to inform the community as we address these issues.

Proposed Retail Fuel Outlet

Council's CEO was recently invited by the Planning Commission to make comment in relation to a proposed retail fuel outlet at Jenny Place. On 14 July 2020, Council resolved that the Minister for Planning be asked to declare the Development Assessment Commission the relevant authority in relation to the application. The main reason for that request was to avoid any perceived bias on behalf of Council. Actions of a previous Council resulted in litigation in the Supreme Court. Further details are provided in the Minutes of the Council meeting of 14 July 2020. Council's CEO has chosen not to make any comment in relation to the merits of the new application. However, we will request the Commission to consider a number of permit conditions relating to Council roads and water pipes that may be impacted by the development. Details of the application can be found on Council's website as Attachment 6 to the Minutes of the meeting of 24 August 2021.





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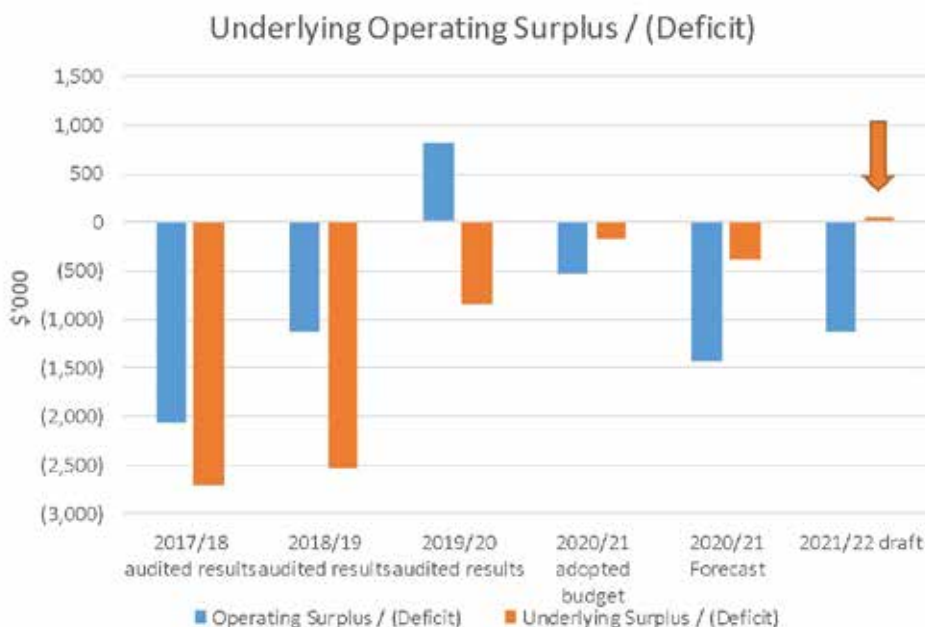
July/August 2021

Annual Business Plan and Budget

The ABP and Budget is one of the most important planning documents that Council produces. It sets out in detail the activities and initiatives Council intends to undertake for the 2021-22 financial year, the costs of those activities, and the sources of income necessary to fund them. It provides a clear picture of Council's expected financial performance and position for the next 12 months. The Plan continues the recent trend of improvements in accountability to the community and transparency in what Council does.

Pleasingly, Council is able to fund 39 legacy issues – important activities that were unable to be funded in the past. For the first time in many years, Council has budgeted for a small underlying operating surplus as the graph below shows. This represents a remarkable improvement of \$2.7m debt since 2017-18.

The budget includes an extensive capital works program of about \$2 million of which \$400k relies on new borrowings. Despite Council's improved financial performance, it is still not generating sufficient cash to fund its planned infrastructure renewal



program. Council continues the transition to a new, simpler, rating structure that will see the fixed charge reduce from \$300 to \$200. The commercial rate will reduce by 5%. Residential rates will increase by an average of 4.9%. The average rate rise is the same as the CPI which is only 1.2%.

Water tariffs will increase by 3.3% (annualised) which results in a return on Council's investment of less than half of one percent. Council is legally allowed to make a 3.84% return, however, this would have resulted in an unacceptable increase in tariffs of about 19%.

Cooper Pedy Wellbeing Labyrinth Takes Shape

Works Manager, John Whitaker and his team have formed the base of the Wellbeing Labyrinth and its access pathway. The site sits between the Triangle parkland and the wetlands. Karen Jones and Claire Lassere performed a trial peg out of the '7-seed' pattern to see how the design sits on the site. Once base preparations have been completed, the committee will then commence forming the Labyrinth.

Are you feeling stressed, overwhelmed, or confused? Is your mind chewing on a problem that seems to have no solution? Once the Wellbeing Labyrinth is completed, consider taking a special kind of walk designed to help your journey inward. In general, labyrinth walking is used to promote relaxation and relieve stress. Soon, anyone looking for some peace and quiet will benefit from taking the journey to the centre of Cooper Pedy's Wellbeing Labyrinth!





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Opal Capital of the World

July/ August 2021

Smart Meter Project Rollout Begins

Cooper Pedy's Smart Meter installations will begin Wednesday 1 September 2021. Around 1,500 meters are planned to be installed by 20 December.

Cooper Pedy's electricity meters are being replaced with new Smart Meters that will help to improve energy efficiency and service delivery. The new Smart Meters and In-Home Displays are provided free-of-charge and will have no impact on tariff prices, or the quantity or quality of electricity supplied to customers.

The Remote Areas Energy Supplies (RAES) Scheme is a part of the Government of South Australia's Department for Energy and Mining. RAES will meet the entire cost of the project. Cowell Electric have been contracted by RAES to install the new Smart Meters. A power outage of around one to two hours will be required for the purposes of installing your new Smart Meter.

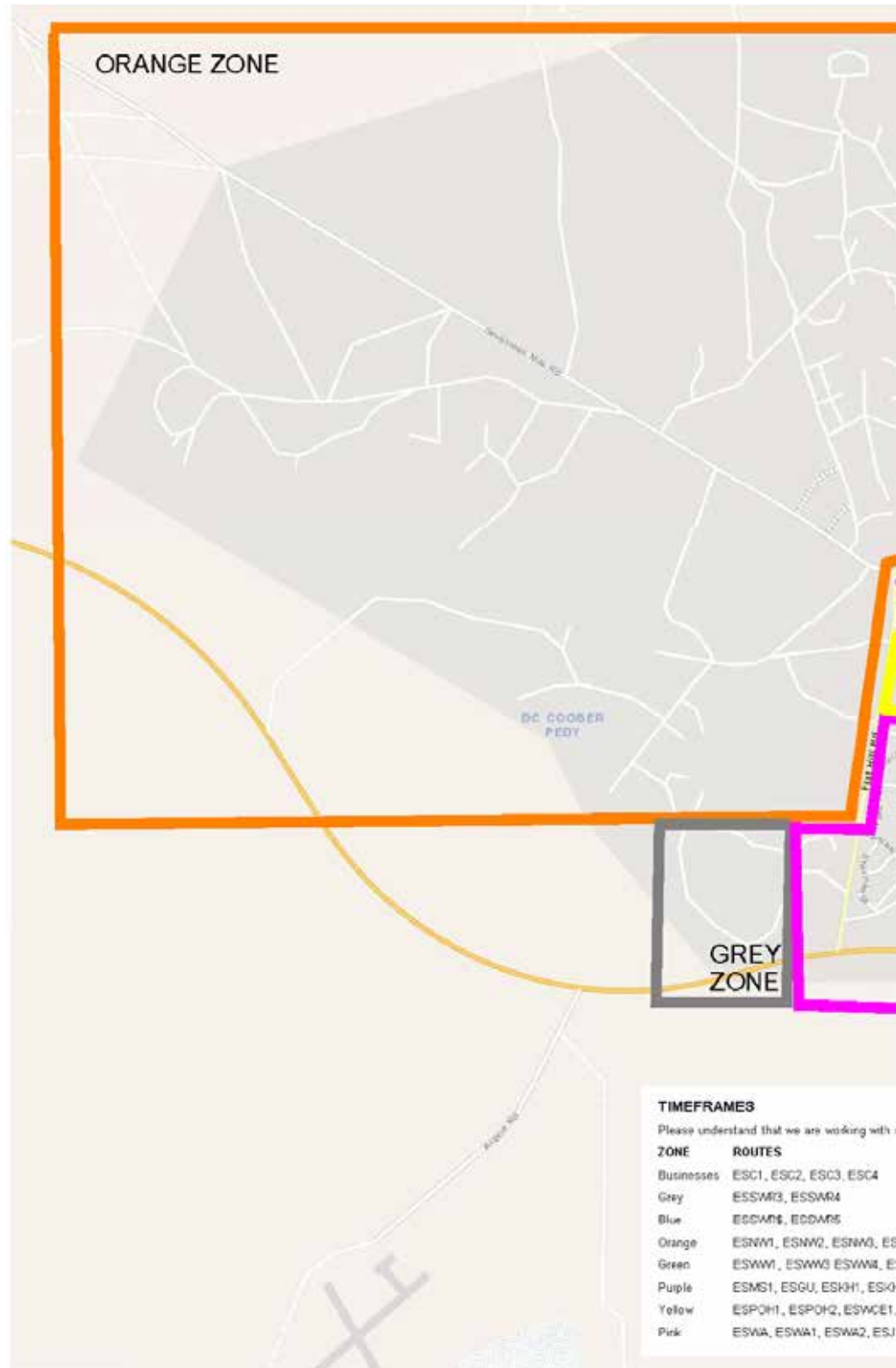
All electricity customers are required to provide safe access to their meters. Please ensure that the area around your meter is clear and presents no hazards for the installers. Please contact Council as soon as possible if your meter is inside your house/building, locked in a cage or requires a key to access your premises or if you have dogs or pets that require restraint for the duration of the installation.

Once installed, your new Smart Meter can be read remotely via the Telstra or Optus networks. This means a meter reader will no longer need to access your property for standard electricity meter reads. If you are in a low cell phone reception area, you may also notice a small black or grey device

attached to your meter box. This will be the antenna that boosts the signal to enable your meter to be read remotely.

Your September 2021 bill will include charges for electricity consumption and supply charge up to the usual meter

read on 1 September 2021. You will receive an interim bill when your old meter is removed during September to November. Your December 2021 bill will show your new meter number and charges from when the new meter was installed to the usual meter read on 1





District Council of Coober Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/August 2021

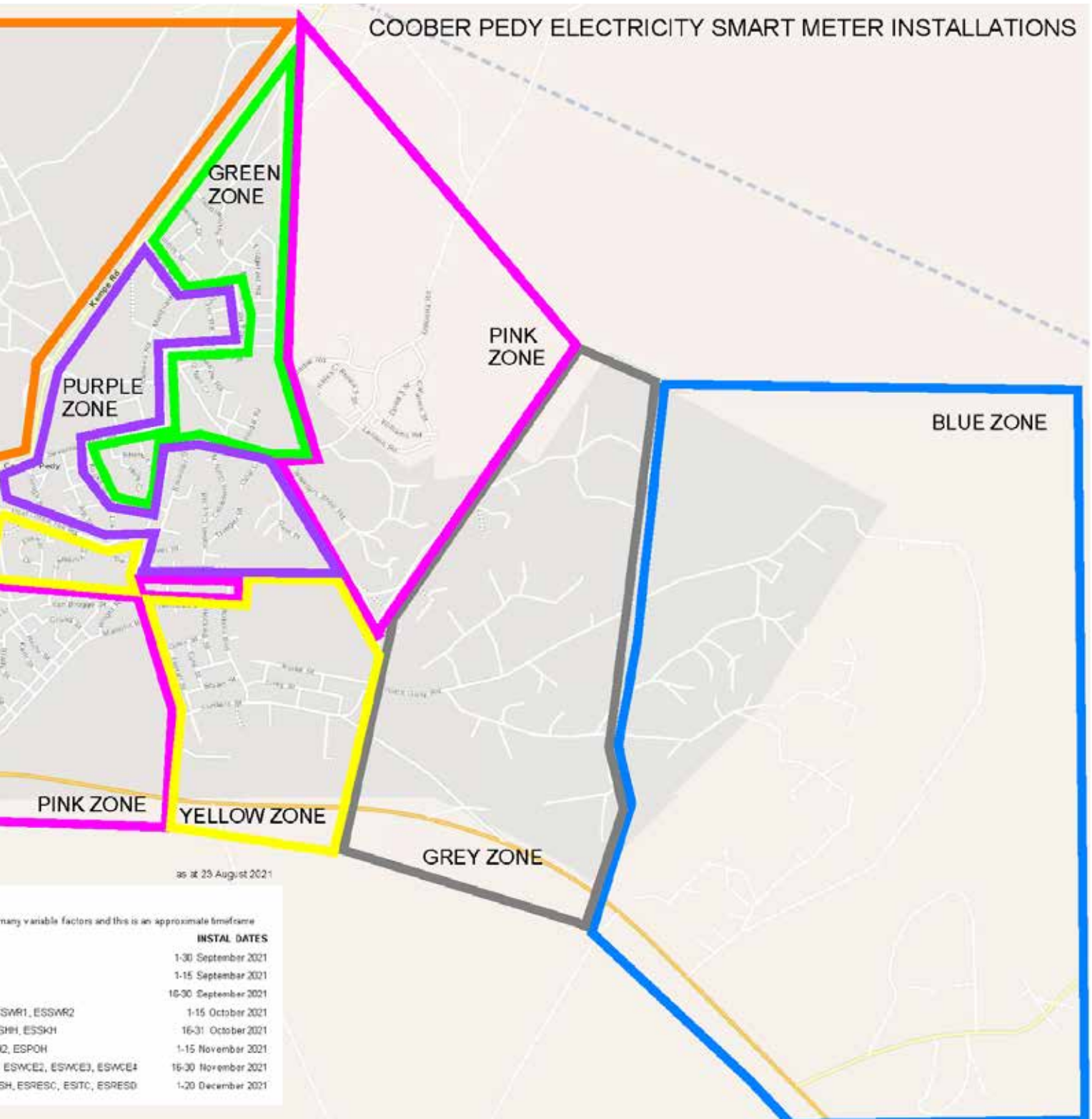
December 2021.

A sample Smart Meter and In-Home Display are available for inspection at Council's administration office from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Council's

Electricity and Water Administration Officer, Cherry-Anne Amiyan on 08 8672 4600 or CAmiyan@cpcouncil.sa.gov.au

The zoned map included in this newsletter will assist you with knowing

when your area is scheduled for the installation. Please understand that we are working with many variable factors and the installation schedule is a guide only.





District Council of Coober Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/ August 2021

Water Operations EOI

Council has received 5 expressions of interest from private companies who are interested in taking over Council's water operations. A panel of engineers, procurement experts and the CEO will shortly assess the expressions of interest that have been received to shortlist companies for a full tender process. The panel will assess each company's ability to provide potable water to the town and whether it has the financial capacity to invest the necessary sums of money to renew critical infrastructure. The companies that have been shortlisted will be required to spend time in Coober Pedy assessing all of the critical components of the system, including the bore, pipes, reverse osmosis plant, water storage facilities, valves, and pumps. To assist Council through this process, we are seeking to employ a suitably qualified project manager on a casual basis. Anyone who is interested in this role is encouraged to contact Council's CEO before Friday 3 September. The ultimate objective of testing the market is to drive water tariffs down to Adelaide prices. Currently, water tariffs are three times the price that most people in the State pay. This may require a government subsidy similar to the electricity subsidy that the government gives Coober Pedy. A subsidy would also mean that Coober Pedy would be treated no differently to other remote areas of the State that receive water subsidies from the government via SA Water. An updated timetable for this project appears in the Minutes of the Council meeting of 24 August.

Quarterly Report to the Minister

Every three months, the Administrator prepares a quarterly report to the Minister for Local Government in relation to Council's activities and key achievements across all of our operations. The report includes an update on Council's financial situation and progress towards improving internal controls. The Local Government Minister commended the Administrator on his latest report which covers the six-month period from January to June. The report is available on Council's website and is labelled Attachment 2 of the Minutes of the meeting of 24 August.

Dreaming the Future Coober Pedy

Coober Pedy is a community of passionate people who love their community and are committed to finding the best ways to move forward for all people. This is something that no one can argue with.

Michael Edgecomb has had the privilege of getting to know many people in the Coober Pedy community over the past few months as we begin a journey of bringing together a community plan of ideas and dreams for the future of the town. This story started with a review of the Coober Pedy 2030 (CP30) process and plan and is now landing on a new way forward.

"I hold a firm belief that communities know what they want, what they need, and that they have a clear idea of who they want to be. This story is about working together to find the identity of Coober Pedy in 2021, to dream and vision together about what we'd like to see as Coober Pedy in the coming years and supporting the community to find the resources to make it happen," said Mr Edgecomb.

A Round Table discussion/meeting was held on 2 August 2021, which saw almost 50 people from across the community come together to explore a way forward. A Round Table communique and recording can be found on Council's website. Since then, Michael has been meeting with individuals, groups, families, and businesses across Coober Pedy to listen and hear what ideas, dreams and visions people have in mind for the town.

Very soon, Council will advertise dates for community workshops to be held around Coober Pedy in September and October. Everyone is welcome to come along. These workshops will be about sharing and finding the collective dreams and visions of the community. A detailed plan will be generated from these workshops. We are building a container for change, which includes the new leadership group, an agreed way of working, one vision and plan, and measurable outcomes.



District Council of Coober Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/August 2021

Celebrating 20 Years of Service at Council

These days, Australia's job mobility is a long way from 'job for life'. In fact, it's closer to three jobs per decade! Today the national average tenure in a job is 3 years and 4 months. That's why Council and the community of Coober Pedy are lucky to have a man like James Michie in our corner.

5 February 2021 marked 20 years of James serving the community as a member of our team. What is James' job? A better question may be, what isn't James' job? From dog catcher to airport maintenance, from store-man to surveyor – James has done it all.

In 2007, James' supervisor wrote, *"James is a dependable employee who readily takes on any task that is asked of him and works well unsupervised."* 14 years later, nothing has changed. When there's work to do, James is the bloke that rolls up his sleeves and just gets it done.

James not only serves the community as an employee of Council but also as a dedicated volunteer. He has been an essential member of the Coober Pedy Shooters Club for over 17 years. His varied roles such as Armourer, Range Master and committee member has meant that club members can make use of the great facilities that the club offers. Given that shooting is a sport that doesn't require strenuous exercise, the club plays an important role in combating social isolation for older members of our community.

Council pays tribute to James for his service and dedication not only to his employer but also to his community. A town is built by bricks and mortar (or in Coober Pedy's case – excavators and tunnelling machines) but a community is built by people like James Michie.



Council farewells Sandy

Sandy Rathnayake has been a highly valued member of Council's administration team for over 3 years. Sandy and her family arrived in Coober Pedy in January 2017 after her husband Sanka, was offered a position at John's Pizza Bar and Restaurant.

"If it wasn't for Mark and Sean then we would never have had the chance to start our Coober Pedy story so I really want them to understand how much we will always remember what they did for us and the opportunity they gave us," she said.

Sandy worked for Council for three and a half years. she held a number of roles until finding her niche with the finance team. Sandy also volunteered and helped in many community sports and cultural events including the Opal Festival.



Sandy will be sorely missed by Council for her kind nature, friendly attitude and willingness to help out other team members whenever required. She brought joy and happiness to Council and a smile that lit up the office every morning.

"The thing I'll miss most about Coober Pedy are the people, especially my colleagues and friends at the Council. Coober Pedy is an amazing place full of amazing people that I will never forget," she said.

Sandy and Sanka and their two beautiful children, Tinasha and Tiaan, is a loss to our community but a gain to whatever community they join in the future.

Goodbye and good luck Sandy and family. Thanks for the memories!



District Council of Coober Pedy Newsletter

Opal Capital of the World

July/ August 2021

Consultation at Council

Council Continues to Consult on RV Parking

Given the strong community interest in the matter, Council has decided to extend the RV camping consultation period.

Recreational vehicles (RVs) are part of the tourism experience across Australia. RVs are specifically designed to include their own accommodation and can often be fully self-contained, removing their dependence on facilities traditionally provided by caravan parks. Many RV owners simply need a place to park-up for the night – known as ‘freedom camping’ within the RV fraternity. However, if RVs are not managed and shepherded then they may park in inappropriate places, upsetting the local community. This can create tension in tourist reliant towns like Coober Pedy.

Essentially, Coober Pedy needs to decide whether it is an ‘RV Friendly’ or ‘RV Unfriendly’ town.

The Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) has over 70,000 members and is the largest RV club in the southern hemisphere. The CMCA determines whether a town is RV Friendly or RV Unfriendly based on the following essential criteria:

- provision of appropriate parking within the town centre, with access to a general shopping area for groceries and fresh produce;
- provision of short term, low cost overnight parking (24/48 hours) for self-contained recreational vehicles, as close as possible to the CBD;
- access to potable water; and
- access to a free dump point at an appropriate location.

Further, desirable criteria includes:

- Provision of long-term parking for self-contained recreational vehicles;
- Access to medical facilities or an appropriate emergency service;
- Access to a pharmacy or a procedure to obtain pharmaceutical products;
- Visitor Information Centre (VIC) with appropriate parking facilities;
- VIC to provide a town map showing essential facilities, such as short and long term parking areas, dump point and potable water; and
- RV Friendly Town™ signs to be erected within the town precinct.

The CMCA also looks at the general attitude of the local council and the business owners towards RV freedom campers.

The aim of Council is to better understand the views and impacts of RVs on the people and businesses in our community so that any decisions made by Council are in line with community sentiments and expectations. Council will be assisted in this process by the expertise of an independent, external town planner.

Further information will be forthcoming once the town planner’s availability has been confirmed, and the dates for the community information and Q & A session have been set.

Child and Parenting Support Programs

Wednesday 10am - **Magical Mum's, Share our space (Youth Shed)**

brought to you by Uniting Country SA and CaPS

Thursday 10am - **Tiny Tackers at The Shed (Youth Shed)**

For 0 - 5 year olds and their parents/carers.

All welcome

Contact Raksha on 0427 264 969 for more information.

Service Contact Numbers
Administration Office
(08) 8672 4600

Mini Gems Childrens' Centre
(08) 8672 4623

Library
(08) 8672 4635

Electricity, Water, Works Depot
(08) 86724 626

On-Call Numbers
Aerodrome
0400 108 230

Dog Control
0408 693 672

Electricity
0417 814 617

Water
0417 811 470

Works
0417 813 571