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Advice

Local Government Advice

City of Salisbury

February 2023

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Glossary of terms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMP	Asset management plan (also called an IAMP)
Commission	Essential Services Commission, established under the <i>Essential Services Commission Act 2002</i>
CPI	Consumer Price Index (Adelaide, All Groups)
Council	City of Salisbury
CWMS	Community Wastewater Management System
ESC Act	<i>Essential Services Commission Act 2002</i>
F&A	Local Government Advice: Framework and Approach – Final Report
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
IAMP	Infrastructure and asset management plan (also called an AMP)
LG Act	<i>Local Government Act 1999</i>
LGA SA Financial Indicators Paper	Local Government Association of South Australia, Financial Sustainability Information Paper 9 - Financial Indicators Revised May 2019
LGGC	Local Government Grants Commission
LGPI	Local Government Price Index
LTFP	Long-term financial plan
Regulations	<i>Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 2011</i>
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia
SACES	The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SMP	Strategic management plan
SG	Superannuation Guarantee
The scheme or advice	Local Government Advice Scheme

1 The Commission's key advice findings for the City of Salisbury

The Essential Services Commission (**Commission**) finds the City of Salisbury's (**Council's**) current financial outlook sustainable with conservative operating surpluses projected from the forecast growth in operating income marginally outpacing forecast cost growth. The Council expects to continue to renew its asset base at appropriate levels. However, its future financial position remains reliant on continued rate increases above inflation to help fund the current period of high infrastructure and service investment where there are cost risks.

Acknowledging this outlook, the Commission suggests the following steps to ensure that it budgets prudently, prioritises its capital spending in a transparent fashion, manages its cost base efficiently, considers spreading its borrowing repayments over a longer time period, plans its asset needs appropriately and ultimately, constrains the extent of further rate increases:

Budgeting and consultation considerations

1. **Continue** to review its inflation forecasts in its budget and forward projections, given the potential for higher short-term outcomes before a return to long-run averages.
2. **Focus** on controlling cost growth in its budgeting, including by reviewing its projected capital expenditure allocations (in consultation with the community, as required) to remove those which are not yet tied to defined and costed projects, and reduce the need for further rate increases.
3. **Ensure** that it publishes relevant reports regarding community consultation outcomes about large infrastructure projects which are to be significantly rate-funded.

Providing evidence of ongoing cost efficiencies

4. **Report** its actual and projected cost savings in its annual budget, to provide evidence of controlling cost growth and achieving efficiency across its operations and service delivery.

Managing operating cost risk

5. **Develop and publish** a risk management plan for the Salisbury Aquatic Centre, which incorporates an annual review of the requirements for recurrent spending (given demand estimates and outcomes), and the associated impact on the Council's operating capacity and quantum of rate contributions.

Borrowing repayment considerations

6. **Review** its projected borrowing repayment plans in its long-term financial plan projections with a view to spreading the repayments over a longer time period, if possible, to reduce the extent of the required financial contributions from ratepayers to meet repayments in the short to medium term.

Refinements to asset management planning

7. **Review** the assumptions underpinning its asset management plans to ensure those plans incorporate a more accurate picture of required asset expenditure and better align with the allocations in its long-term financial plan as necessary, including the estimates of asset lives and valuations feeding into the forecast rates of asset consumption and depreciation expenses.
8. **Review** the new and upgraded asset expenditure projections (as per **Finding 2**) with consideration of the service levels desired by the community.

Containing rate levels

9. **Review** and **consider** limiting future minimum rate and average rate increases above inflation, particularly on rate categories which have lower capacity to pay, to help minimise affordability risk in the community.

2 About the advice

The Essential Services Commission (**Commission**), South Australia's independent economic regulator and advisory body, has been given a role by the State Government to provide advice on material changes proposed by local councils in relation to elements of their strategic management plans (**SMPs**) and on the proposed revenue sources, including rates, which underpin those plans.¹

One of the main purposes of the Local Government Advice Scheme (**advice or the scheme**) is to support councils to make 'financially sustainable' decisions relating to their annual business plans and budgets in the context of their long-term financial plans (**LTFPs**) and infrastructure and asset management plans (**IAMPs**)² – both required as part of a council's SMP.³ Financial sustainability is considered to encompass intergenerational equity,⁴ as well as program (service level) and rates stability in this context.⁵ The other main purpose is for the Commission to consider ratepayer contributions in the context of revenue sources, outlined in the LTFP.⁶ In addition, the Commission has discretion to provide advice on any other aspect of a council's LTFP or IAMP it considers appropriate, having regard to the circumstances of that council.⁷

The first cycle of the scheme extends over four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26, and the Commission has selected 15 councils for advice in the first scheme year (2022-23), including the City of Salisbury (**Council**).

This report provides the Local Government Advice for the City of Salisbury in 2022-23.

The Council is obliged under the *Local Government Act 1999* (**LG Act**) to publish this advice and its response, if applicable, in its 2023-24 Annual Business Plan (including any draft Annual Business Plan) and subsequent plans until the next cycle of the scheme.⁸ It does not need to publish the attachment to the advice (these will be available with the advice on the Commission's website⁹), nor is it compelled under the LG Act to follow the advice. The Commission thanks the City of Salisbury for providing relevant information to assist the Commission in preparing this advice.

2.1 Summary of advice

The Commission finds the City of Salisbury's current financial outlook sustainable with conservative operating surpluses resulting from its forecast income growth, led by rates growth, marginally exceeding the forecast operating cost growth associated with its service expansion plans. In the past 10 years, the Council has run relatively large operating surpluses, suggesting a period of service consolidation amidst moderate growth, while the community paid higher rate levels in real terms.

The Council has entered a period of service expansion with the Salisbury Aquatic Centre project and other capital enhancement plans. The Council's LTFP projections from 2022-23 forecast:

¹ Amendments to the *Local Government Act 1999* (s122(1c) to (1k) and (9)) specify the responsibilities for the Commission and local councils for the Local Government Scheme Advice. The Commission must provide advice to each council in accordance with the matters outlined in s122(1e), (1f) and (1g).

² Commonly referred to as asset management plans.

³ The objectives of the advice with reference to a council's LTFP and IAMPs are presented under LG Act, s122(1g). LG Act s122(1) specifies the requirements of a council's SMP, including the LTFP and IAMPs.

⁴ 'Intergenerational equity' relates to fairly sharing services and the revenue generated to fund the services between current and future ratepayers.

⁵ Commission, *Framework and Approach – Final Report*, August 2022, pp. 2-3, available at www.escosa.sa.gov.au/advice/advice-to-local-government.

⁶ LG Act s122(1f)(a) and (1g)(a)(ii).

⁷ LG Act s122(1f)(b) and (1g)(b).

⁸ LG Act s122(1h).

⁹ The Commission must publish its advice under LG Act s122(1i)(a).

- ▶ higher average cost increases than it has experienced over the past 10 years (and higher than projected inflation)
- ▶ the continued prioritisation of its asset expenditure on renewal and rehabilitation works, as well as higher spending on new and upgraded assets, and
- ▶ continued rate increases on the community, above the rate of inflation.

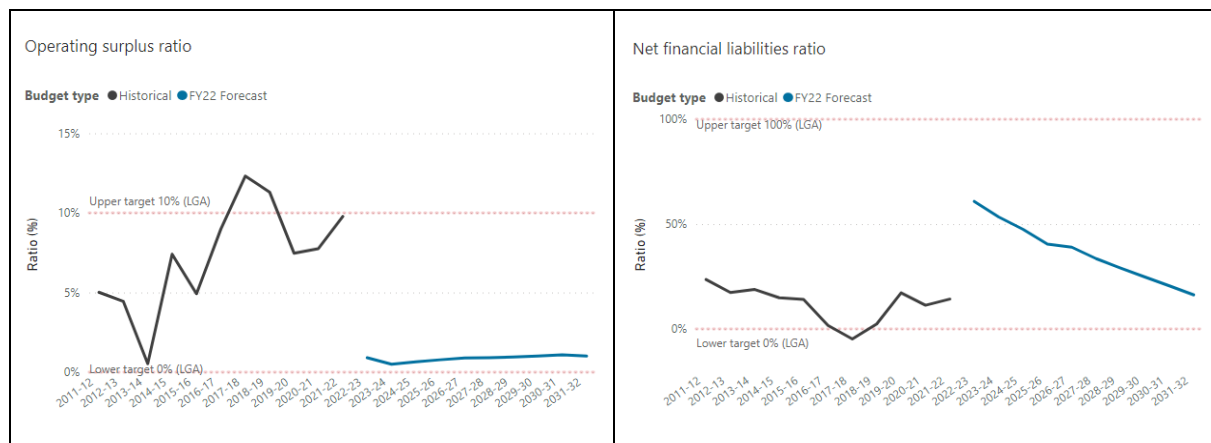
There are current risks to its financial sustainability arising from the extent of funding it has allocated for undefined capital projects in its forward projections, noting that the Salisbury Aquatic Centre project costs and associated service offerings have increased considerably from those originally planned. The Commission encourages the City of Salisbury to review these spending allocations critically and to publish community consultation outcomes on future spending priorities. The Commission has also observed that the Council's AMPs were last updated in 2015, which raises questions as to the current knowledge of the condition and the cost implications of maintaining or renewing the existing assets.

To finance the infrastructure projects, the Council has also borrowed more (with projected debt amounts still well within acceptable limits) and there might be an opportunity to reduce annual repayments with a longer loan payback period. This would then reduce the need for higher rate increases in the short to medium term.

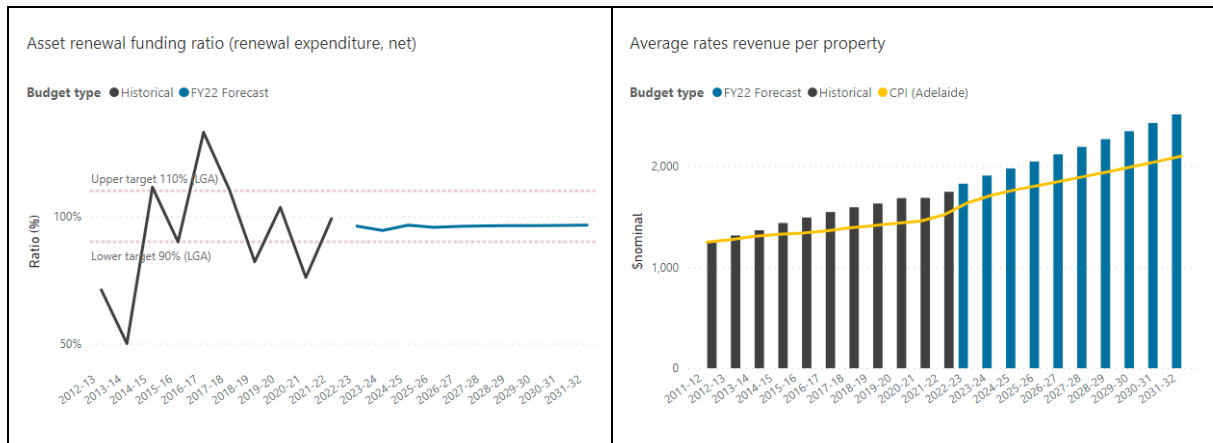
The Commission considers that there may also be opportunities to continue to achieve savings and efficiencies in its recurrent budget and encourages the Council to review and report on this. This includes a review of the asset-related assumptions feeding into its estimated depreciation expenses.

The charts below of the City of Salisbury's past and projected operating surplus ratio, net financial liabilities ratio, asset renewal funding ratio and average rate revenue per property, together support these findings.

The 'heat map' diagram (over the page) summarises the Commission's findings with reference to whether the Council has met the suggested Local Government Association (LGA) target ranges for the three main financial sustainability indicators¹⁰ and the level of cost control and affordability risk identified for the Council over time.



¹⁰ The suggested LGA target range for the ratios are discussed in more detail in the attachment.



Summary of the City of Salisbury’s financial sustainability performance and the Commission’s risk assessment

Financial sustainability indicators:	Last 10 years from 2011-12 (Actual performance)	2021-22 estimate	Next 10 years from 2022-23 (Council forecasts)
Operating surplus ratio (target 0-10%)	Operating surpluses and target range generally met to 2021-22 (with high surpluses in two years) →		Ratio forecast to be met with continued operating surpluses →
Net financial liabilities ratio (target 0-100%)	Ratio met historically (apart from negative result 2017-18) and in forecast period →		
Asset renewal funding ratio (target 90-110%)	Below target range	Some volatility but ratio generally within target range, on average →	Asset renewal spending in line with AMPs over LTFP projections →
Identified Risks:			
Cost control risk	Operating expenses per property average growth 1.9% p.a. to 2021-22 (CPI 2.0%) →	Cost pressures to 2024-25	Projected operating expenses per property average growth 3.1% p.a. (7 years to 2031-32)
Affordability risk	Rate revenue per property average growth 3.4% p.a. to 2021-22 (CPI 2.0%) →	Rate revenue per property forecast average growth 3.6% p.a. to 2031-32 (CPI 2.8%), with lower capacity to pay indicators →	

- Ratio outside suggested LGA target range or higher risk
- Ratio close to suggested LGA target range or medium risk
- Ratio within suggested LGA target range or lower risk

The affordability risk for higher rate levels for the community could also be managed by:

- ▶ continuing community engagement on further rate increases and associated service level outcomes, to ensure continued support for any further increases, especially related to subsidising new capital initiatives, and
- ▶ reviewing the Council’s rating policy to ensure the equitable sharing of the revenue requirement and consider minimising increases on more vulnerable groups of the community where the affordability risk is higher.

2.2 Detailed advice findings

The next sections summarise the Commission's more detailed observations and advice findings regarding the City of Salisbury's material changes to its 2022-23 plans (compared with the previous year's plans), its financial sustainability (in the context of its long-term operating performance, net financial liabilities, and asset renewals expenditure) and its current and projected rate levels.

In providing this advice, the Commission has followed the approach it previously explained in the Framework and Approach – Final Report (F&A). The attachment explores these matters further.¹¹

2.2.1 Advice on material plan amendments in 2022-23

The Commission has compared the City of Salisbury's projections in its 2022-23 LTFP with those from its 2021-22 LTFP and focused on the aggregate of the nine overlapping years' statistics: 2022-23 to 2030-31 to ensure a comparable analysis of material amendments.

The City of Salisbury's 2022-23 LTFP includes increases to its projected income, operating expenses, and capital expenditure estimates to 2030-31, compared with the 2021-22 forecasts.¹² Its operating position amendments are as follows:

- ▶ An additional \$82.1 million or 6 percent in total operating income. This includes an additional \$26.5 million or 50 percent due to higher user charges, mainly relating to the new Salisbury Aquatic Centre, which is currently expected to be operational by mid-2024.¹³ The Council stated in its 2022-23 LTFP that rates revenue estimates were also increased by an average of 0.6 percentage points per annum above inflation.¹⁴
- ▶ An additional \$88.1 million or 6 percent in total operating expenses. This includes an additional \$41.6 million or 7 percent for 'materials, contracts and other' expenses, and an additional \$38.0 million or 9 percent in 'employee costs'. Much of that increase is due to the expanded scope of the Salisbury Aquatic Centre, noting that higher inflation will also have an impact across all years of the LTFP.

Based on the Council's assumptions in its 2022-23 LTFP, an increase in its costs and revenue estimates by around 6 percent over the 2022-23 to 2030-31 forecast period¹⁵ would account for higher inflation, compared with same estimates in its 2021-22 LTFP.

The Council has assumed Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation growth of 3.3 percent in 2022-23, then 2.8 percent in 2023-24 and 2.5 percent per annum from 2024-25. The Commission notes that compared with Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) estimates the Council's stated assumptions for indexation in the short term could be low in the current inflationary environment, but that its assumptions thereafter are consistent with a return to long-run averages.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the need

¹¹ The attachment will be available on the Commission's website with the advice.

¹² The overlapping forecast period in both LTFPs (2021-22 to 2030-31 and 2022-23 to 2031-32).

¹³ City of Salisbury, *Media Release: "Exciting plans released for new Salisbury Aquatic Centre"*, 23 December 2022, available at: <https://www.salisbury.sa.gov.au/>

¹⁴ City of Salisbury, *2022/23 Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan*, June 2022, p. 17, available at <https://www.salisbury.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Council/22-23-Long-Term-Financial-Plan-and-Annual-Business-Plan.pdf>. The Commission notes that the projected average rates per property increase above the Council's projected CPI inflation growth to 2031-32 (in the Council's LTFP projections) is higher by 0.6 percent each year.

¹⁵ The set of nine years forecast in both the 2021-22 and 2022-23 LTFP projections.

¹⁶ RBA, *Forecast Table - February 2023*, available at <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2023/feb/forecasts.html>. The CPI (Australia-wide) is forecast to increase by 6.7 percent in the year to the June 2023 quarter, by 3.6 percent in the year to the June 2024 quarter and by 3.0 percent in the year to the June 2025 quarter. Beyond June 2025, the RBA has not published inflation

for the Council to endeavour to find savings and reduce any inflationary impact on its community, the Commission has found that it would be appropriate for it to:

1. **Continue** to review its inflation forecasts in its budget and forward projections, given the potential for higher short-term outcomes before a return to long-run averages.

The City of Salisbury's LTFP 2022-23 also incorporates an increase of \$52.9 million or 35 percent for capital expenditure on new and upgraded assets, over the period 2022-23 to 2030-31. Much of the increase is driven by the expanded scope of the Salisbury Aquatic Centre (from \$15.5 million to \$28.4 million), the carryover and retiming of part of the Council's prior years' infrastructure recovery program (which was not spent previously), and an increase in funding for new and upgraded assets by \$19.0 million over the period from 2025-26 to 2030-31.

The additional capital expenditure factored into the forward projections is being funded in large part by additional rate contributions, but much of the allocations are general without specific projects yet defined. The Commission notes that the Council generally demonstrates good governance related to its capital enhancement projects and the regular consultation of its community on service priorities and funding requirements. However, an implication of the Council 'locking in' significant funding allocations in its 2022-23 LTFP for undefined future projects is that it must also plan for further rate increases above inflation to help fund them.

The Salisbury Aquatic Centre¹⁷ was not in the Council's City Plan 2035 nor a particularly high priority in its 2020 community survey results;¹⁸ it also brings potentially significant upfront and ongoing costs in terms of subsidising its operation.¹⁹ The Council has not yet published the report containing the community consultation results specifically related to the facility.²⁰

The Commission notes that it is for the Council to determine the service level enhancements it wishes to provide to its community but, for the reasons identified above, it has also found that it would be appropriate to the City of Salisbury to:

2. **Focus** on controlling cost growth in its budgeting, including by reviewing its projected capital expenditure allocations (in consultation with the community, as required) to remove those which are not yet tied to defined and costed projects, and reduce the need for further rate increases.
3. **Ensure** that it publishes relevant reports regarding community consultation outcomes about large infrastructure projects which are to be significantly rate-funded.

forecasts, but a return to the long-term average (of 2.5 percent based on the midpoint of the RBA's target range of 2 and 3 percent) is a reasonable assumption.

¹⁷ The Council will receive grant funding of \$7.2 million for the aquatic centre from the South Australian Government. City of Salisbury, *2022/23 Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan*, June 2022, p. 7.

¹⁸ McGregor Tan, *City of Salisbury Community Perceptions*, December 2020, p 28, available at https://www.salisbury.sa.gov.au/assets/files/assets/public/general_documents/council/have_your_say/community_perceptions_2020_-_final_for_website.pdf. The survey results showed that 7 percent of respondents felt there was 'more things to do' by the Council related to recreation services and youth activities. Three service areas were identified as higher priority for improvement (the rest lower).

¹⁹ As identified in Dean Newbery, *Prudential Report, Salisbury Recreation Precinct Project*, November 2021 and discussed further in section C.1.

²⁰ This refers to consultation undertaken by UPRS in 2021, as referenced in Dean Newbery, *Prudential Report, Salisbury Recreation Precinct Project*, November 2021, p. 6. The Council's website otherwise provides consultation outcomes for its key infrastructure projects.

2.2.2 Advice on financial sustainability

Operating performance

The City of Salisbury has had operating surpluses from 2011-12 to 2020-21 and, in the last five years (to 2020-21), it achieved an operating surplus averaging \$11.9 million per annum (mainly used to repay borrowings and to support funding an increasing capital expenditure program). Its operating surplus ratio is forecast to reduce to more conservative levels and will remain within the suggested LGA target range over the forecast period to 2031-32 (when it will average 0.9 percent or \$1.5 million per annum).²¹

The Council generated operating income growth of 2.8 percent per annum from 2011-12 to 2020-21, compared with operating expense growth of 2.4 percent per annum.²² This exceeded the average rate of CPI inflation (1.7 percent per annum) over that period.²³ Rate revenue growth of 4.0 percent led the income growth, with offsetting reductions in user charges and grants income. Expense growth was led by higher depreciation expenses (4.4 percent) and 'materials, contracts and other' expenses (2.7 percent).²⁴ The Council's 'employee costs' increased by an average of 1.4 percent annum (reflecting a decrease of approximately six Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) per year).

Looking ahead, the estimated average growth in operating expenses over the next 10 years of 4.1 percent per annum²⁵ (which is higher than RBA-based forecast inflation growth of 2.8 percent),²⁶ combined with higher growth from rates and user charges, is expected to maintain the Council's operating performance. The Council is projecting average annual rates revenue growth of 4.2 percent (to 2031-32), which assumes average growth in rateable property numbers of 0.6 per annum (the impact on ratepayers is discussed further below).

To minimise cost and ultimately, rate pressures, it is important that the Council finds opportunities for tangible savings in its budget, where possible. The Council noted that it had implemented an energy efficiency program in its 2022-23 budget.²⁷ However, it does not appear to have identified the quantum of the savings generated nor shown any other tangible savings. Given the extent of the Council's increase in operating expenses forecast over the next 10 years, the Commission considers that it would be important for the City of Salisbury to:

4. **Report** its actual and projected cost savings in its annual budget, to provide evidence of constraining cost growth and achieving efficiency across its future operations and service delivery.

The Council has estimated that the Salisbury Aquatic Centre will also contribute to a lower operating surplus ratio, with net operating losses forecast, over the first five years of operation, totalling \$5.4 million (including depreciation and excluding debt servicing costs). Thereafter annual losses are

²¹ The operating surplus ratio is defined as: Operating Surplus (Deficit) ÷ Total Operating Income. The general target is to achieve, on average over time, an operating surplus ratio of between zero and 10 percent (Local Government Association of South Australia, *Financial Sustainability Information Paper 9 - Financial Indicators Revised*, May 2019 (LGA SA Financial Indicators Paper), p. 6).

²² Based on the compound average annual growth rate formula (which is the adopted approach to calculating average annual growth rates throughout the Commission's advice).

²³ CPI Adelaide (All groups). Average annual growth in the LGPI published by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies was similar (at 1.9 percent), available at <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/saces/economic-and-social-indicators/local-government-price-index>.

²⁴ The Commission notes the impact of the increase in the solid waste levy on councils' waste management costs.

²⁵ This does not include the initial budgeted increase in total operating expenses of 9.1 percent in 2022-23.

²⁶ The forecast average annual growth in the CPI from 2022-23 to 2031-32 is estimated to be 2.8 percent based on the RBA forecasts for the CPI (Australia-wide) to June 2025 (and the Commission's calculations of average annual percentage growth) and the midpoint of the RBA's target range (2.5 percent) from 2025-26.

²⁷ City of Salisbury, *2022/23 Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan*, June 2022, pp. 88 and 90.

estimated to be up to around \$1 million per annum (once the facility reaches 100 percent capacity). This means that all ratepayers will be expected to subsidise the operations of the aquatic centre over the life of the investment, through their rates.

The average annual net loss annually equates to around \$16 per ratepayer but there are additional risks to the cost estimates. The Commission notes that, as for all major capital projects of this nature, it will be important for the Council to focus on post-construction ownership and operating risks and to have regard to competitive neutrality obligations.²⁸

To manage risks related specifically to the new aquatic facility, the Commission has found that it would be appropriate for the Council to:

5. **Develop** and **publish** a risk management plan for the Salisbury Aquatic Centre, which incorporates annual review of the requirements for recurrent spending (given demand estimates and outcomes), and the associated impact on the Council's operating capacity and quantum of rate contributions.

Net financial liabilities

Despite the Council's large operating surpluses from 2011-12 (including depreciation expenses), its net cash flows after operating and investing (that is, capital-related) activities has averaged \$2.5 million per annum between 2011-12 and 2020-21. This reflects the Council's repayment of borrowings, as well as secured grant funding specifically for new and upgraded assets to support its increasing capital expenditure program.

The Council has consistently used borrowings and other financing options (such as cash and leases) to fund its assets as required, and over time, this has been within the suggested LGA target range for the net financial liabilities ratio.²⁹

It will continue to meet the suggested LGA target range under its 2022-23 forecasts and has projected a reduction in the ratio from a peak of 60 percent in 2022-23 to an average of 25 percent in the five years to 2031-32. The additional borrowings (of \$32 million) will help fund the Council's Salisbury Aquatic Centre for \$25.5 million (its largest capital expenditure item in 2022-23). The Council will also receive grant funding of \$7.2 million for the aquatic centre from the South Australian Government under the Local Government Infrastructure Partnership Program.

The reduction from 2022-23 onwards is projected to come from progressive repayment of total borrowings (of \$24.3 million over the next five years to 2026-27) and higher operating income growth. This indicates that the Council may be accelerating the payback of its new loans relative to the lifespan of its assets (for example the aquatic centre), and it may be appropriate for it to review these financing assumptions in its LTFP, so the loan costs are spread across a longer period.

For this reason, the Commission considers that it would be appropriate for the City of Salisbury to:

6. **Review** its projected borrowing repayment plans in its long-term financial plan projections with a view to spreading the repayments over a longer time period, if possible, to reduce the extent of the required financial contributions from ratepayers to meet repayments in the short to medium term.

²⁸ Dean Newbery, *Prudential Report, Salisbury Recreation Precinct Project*, November 2021, pp. 15 and 26.

²⁹ The net financial liabilities ratio is defined as: Net financial liabilities ÷ Total operating income. This ratio measures the extent to which a council's total operating income covers, or otherwise, its net financial liabilities. The suggested LGA target range is between zero and 100 percent of total operating income, but possibly higher in some circumstances (LGA SA Financial Indicators Paper, pp. 7-8).

Asset renewals expenditure

Between 2011-12 and 2020-21, the City of Salisbury's spending on new or upgraded assets averaged \$20.4 million per annum, compared with \$16.2 million on the renewal of its asset base. However, the overall amount of spending on asset renewals has been within the requirements the Council identified in its AMPs. The asset renewal funding ratio (IAMP-based) was within the suggested LGA target range (90 percent to 110 percent) across years,³⁰ including an average of 90 percent between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

From 2022-23, the Council is increasing both asset renewal and new and upgraded asset expenditure, and its asset renewal funding ratio (IAMP-based) is expected to trend around the mid-point of the suggested LGA target range (with an average annual renewal expenditure of \$17.1 million, in nominal terms). This also coincides with higher forecast spending by the Council on new or upgraded assets (estimated to average \$22.6 million per annum to 2031-32). This reflects the Council's relatively large capital budget in 2022-23, which includes the spend on Salisbury Aquatic Centre Redevelopment (of \$25.5 million in 2022-23).

The Commission encourages the Council to continue to focus on prioritising renewal of its assets in line with its AMP requirements.

With the Council's projected higher capital expenditure, the depreciation expenses are projected to be significantly higher than renewal spending. Renewal spending is forecast to account for 56 percent of depreciation expenses on average to 2031-32.³¹ One area that might be leading to higher depreciation expense forecasts, relative to annual asset renewal expenditure needs, is the Council's recent accumulation of new assets following its capital expenditure projects. Another risk that arises when depreciation expenses exceed spending on asset renewals is that the asset lives are assumed to be shorter (in the depreciation calculation) than occurs in practice. The implication of projecting higher than necessary depreciation expenses is that higher operating income (and potentially higher rates income) is required to generate an operating surplus for the Council.

In general, it would be prudent for the Council to re-examine the key drivers of its depreciation modelling (such as average asset lives and asset valuations), but also its projected increase in new and upgraded capital expenditure over the period of its LTFP.

The Commission has also observed the Council's individual AMPs were last updated in 2015, and the information may include dated assessments of asset condition, service levels, asset renewal requirements and community expectations. In addition, the Council's 2022-23 LTFP includes significantly more expenditure on new and upgraded assets than has been originally projected in the AMPs.

For these reasons, it would be appropriate for the City of Salisbury to:

7. **Review** the assumptions underpinning its asset management plans to ensure those plans incorporate a more accurate picture of required asset expenditure and better align with the allocations in its long-term financial plan as necessary, including the estimates of asset lives

³⁰ The IAMP-based method is the current industry standard whereby asset renewal/replacement expenditure is divided by the recommended expenditure in the IAMP (or AMP). Ideally, this will show the extent to which a council's renewal or replacement expenditure matches the need for this expenditure, as recommended by the plan. The suggested LGA target range for the ratio is 90 to 110 percent (LGA SA Financial Indicators Paper, p. 9).

³¹ The Council's asset renewal funding ratio by the depreciation-based method (where asset renewal/replacement expenditure is divided by depreciation expenses) is forecast to average 53 percent to 2031-32. This ratio shows the extent to which capital expenditure on the renewal and replacement of assets matches the estimated rate at which these assets are used or consumed.

and valuations feeding into the forecast rates of asset consumption and depreciation expenses.

8. **Review** the new and upgraded asset expenditure projections (as per **Finding 2**) with consideration of the service levels desired by the community.

2.2.3 Advice on current and projected rate levels

The City of Salisbury's rate revenue per property growth has averaged 3.4 percent or \$49 per annum for each property over the past 10 years³² and equated to \$1,744 per property in 2021-22. This is double the rate of CPI inflation over this period (averaging 1.7 percent per annum).

The Council implemented a 4.6 percent increase to its rates revenue per property in 2022-23,³³ which is higher than previously forecast in its 2021-22 LTFP. The increase is due to the Council's estimate of higher inflation, and to maintain financial sustainability while also increasing funding to provide expanded services and the ongoing costs of new infrastructure.³⁴ Its 2022-23 LTFP forecasts an average increase of 3.6 percent annum or \$685 in total to existing rates to 2031-32 (to \$2,509), which represents an increase of \$224 above the Council's assumed inflation growth.³⁵

Affordability risk among the community for the further rate increase appears moderate based on a range of factors including the existing rate levels³⁶ and the projected increases (above the forecast rate of inflation), an assessment of the economic resources available to the community³⁷ and the Council's increasing expenditure forecasts (for example related to new and upgraded assets or new service provision) which risks further increases to its general rate levels.

For these reasons, it would be appropriate for the City of Salisbury to:

9. **Review** and **consider** limiting future minimum rate and average rate increases above inflation, particularly on rate categories which have lower capacity to pay, to help minimise affordability risk in the community.

2.3 The Commission's next advice and focus areas

In the next cycle of the scheme, the Commission will review and report upon the City of Salisbury's:

- ▶ ongoing performance against its LTFP estimates
- ▶ review of capital expenditure allocations for undefined projects

³² From 2011-12 to 2021-22.

³³ Based on the Council's Excel template submitted to the Commission.

³⁴ City of Salisbury, *2022/23 Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan*, June 2022, p. 17.

³⁵ The Council's projected CPI inflation is 3.3 percent in 2022-23, 2.8 percent in 2023-24, and then 2.5 percent thereafter (City of Salisbury, *2022/23 Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan*, June 2022, p. 17). This is broadly consistent to the CPI line in charts throughout this Advice which are based on RBA forecasts and then, a return to long-run averages from 2025-26 (with growth of 2.5 percent per annum).

³⁶ Refer to the Councils in Focus website available at https://councilsinfocus.sa.gov.au/councils/city_of_salisbury for 2019-20 rates data by council.

³⁷ The City of Salisbury area is ranked 17 among 71 South Australian 'local government areas' (including Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Maralinga Tjarutja Aboriginal community areas and 'unincorporated SA') on the Australian Bureau of Statistics socio-economic indexes for areas Index of Economic Resources (2016), where a lower score (eg, 1) denotes relatively lower access to economic resources in general, compared with other areas, available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/log?openagent&2033055001%20-%20lga%20indexes.xls&2033.0.55.001&Data%20Cubes&5604C75C214CD3D0CA25825D000F91AE&0&2016&27.03.2018&Latest>.

- ▶ achievement of cost savings and efficiencies, and its reporting of these achievements
- ▶ its risk management progress related to the Salisbury Aquatic Centre
- ▶ progress in reviewing and updating the AMPs and its depreciation expenses, and
- ▶ how it has sought to minimise any affordability risks.



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