

## Rates and Hardship and Debt Recovery Policy Adopted

South Gippsland Shire Council adopted the amended Rates and Hardship and Debt Recovery Policy at its meeting this week.

The amended policy was the result of a full policy review which included benchmarking against 14 other Victorian councils, advice from the Municipal Association of Victoria and feedback from local residents.

The policy is designed to provide support for individual rate payers experiencing financial hardship who need assistance. Balance is required between providing fairness to all ratepayers, responding compassionately to individual ratepayers and Council's legislative requirements to collect rates.

The review found the existing policy to be consistent with industry practice and recommended minor revisions including:

- Clarity regarding the non-waiving of rates and cases where deferral and waivers are required due to interest and legal costs.
- Updated interest waiver amounts
- Assess principal place of residence including a farm in line with Municipal Association Victoria guidelines

South Gippsland Shire's Chair Administrator, Ms Julie Eisenbise was pleased to see the review finalised.

"The ultimate aim of the policy is to provide ratepayers with short-term options to settle their financial obligations. This could include payment plans and waiving small amounts of interest and legal costs to assist in reducing their debt.

"Where an agreement is unable to be made, ratepayers are referred to a financial counsellor to confidentially discuss and make arrangements to suit their personal circumstances. While rates are required for Council to function, we also want to avoid community hardship situations where possible and this policy creates such a balance," said Ms Eisenbise.

Those wishing to view the updated policy can visit [www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/meetings](http://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/meetings)  
Anyone needing assistance with rates payments are encouraged to contact Council's Rates team on 5662 9200.

**PR2511 28/2/20**