2/018 Borrowings

Objective

The policy has been drafted to provide a framework for Town of Port Hedland Council borrowings, so that there is a controlled and disciplined approach to the borrowing of funds for the purpose of:

- Funding new infrastructure
- Renewal or upgrading of existing infrastructure

The policy will ensure that all transactions are in accordance with legislative requirements, whilst minimising the cost of debt. The policy will also safeguard the Town's ability to meet its liabilities and budgetary obligations, and also increase awareness of issues concerning debt management.

Legislative requirements

- Australian Accounting Standards
- *Local Government Act 1995*
- *Local Government Financial Management Regulations 1996*

Delegation of Authority

Authority for implementation of the Borrowings Policy is delegated by Council to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995.* The Chief Executive Officer may sub-delegate the implementation of the Borrowings Policy to other Town Officers.

Prudent person standard

All loan borrowings will be managed with care, diligence and skill that a prudent person would exercise. As trustees of borrowed monies, officers are to safeguard the loan portfolio in accordance with legislative requirements.

Ethics and Conflicts of Interest

Officers shall refrain from personal activities that would conflict with proper execution and management of the Council's loan portfolio. The Department of Local Government and Communities Guideline No 1 "Disclosure of Interest Affecting Impartiality" provide guidance for recognising and disclosing any conflict of interest.

Principle

The following principles will reinforce the measure of control for the Town with reference to borrowings:

- Under no circumstance will operating expenditure be funded by borrowings.
- Replacement or renewal of existing assets that are expected to occur on an annual (or similar) basis (i.e. recurrent capital works such as road resealing, plant replacement etc) will generally not be funded by loan borrowings.
- The economic life of the asset being funded should be greater than the agreed term of the loan. Generally, loans will be paid over a term no longer than 20 years to maintain inter-generational equity so as not to over burden the present ratepayers with the majority of the debt. Any loans less than $1 million will have a term of no longer than 5 years, with loans greater than $1 million but equal to or less than $5 million having a term of no longer than 10 years.
- The nature of any borrowings and the interest rate if applicable, will take into account the purpose of the borrowings and seek to minimise interest rate exposure.
- All borrowings will be considered in line with Council's Long Term Financial Plan and forward program of capital works; and should be in the current adopted Budget. Any variations will be presented to Council for consideration.
- Any unspent loans will be declared in the Annual Financial Statements of that particular Financial Year as part of statutory obligations. If the project being financed has reached completion stage, the unspent portion will be used to pay back the lender, leading to refinancing of the loan or allocated to other projects at the discretion of Council.
- In the event that capital expenditure is deferred from one Financial Year to the next, the timing of the drawdown of the approved loan will be reviewed in order to minimise interest expense.

Lenders and Interest Rates

The Town will undertake a Request for Quotation process to get the best rate and terms possible when intending to borrow funds. The RFQ process will be limited to the major banks and WATC.

Refinancing of Loans

It is generally known that market interest rates are volatile and the cost of borrowing periodically fluctuates. Therefore, if these changes bring a distinct economic advantage to the Town of Port Hedland; whereby the cost of borrowing significantly declines, the Town will reserve the right to refinance the loan portfolio. Council will make the final decision on any change to the loan portfolio or refinancing options.

According to Section 6.20(2)(a) of the Local Government Act 1995:

"A local government is not required to give local public notice of a proposal to exercise a power to borrow when the power is to be exercised to re-finance a loan or to continue other financial accommodation (whether with the same or another bank or financial institution) except where the re-financing or continuation is a major variation.

major variation means a variation in the terms of a loan or other financial accommodation which is —
(a) a capitalisation of interest accruals; or
(b) an increase in the term of the loan or other financial accommodation;
re-finance in relation to a loan or other financial accommodation (the existing loan), means to borrow an amount (the new loan) which is, at the date of the new loan —
(a) equal to the principal amount owing on the existing loan; or
(b) not more than $5 000 more or less than the principal amount owing on the existing loan, for the principal purpose of paying out the existing loan or preserving the credit originally provided by the existing loan."

Paying off debt

Any loan can be paid off in full where it can be demonstrated that there is a significant benefit to the Town. Any retirement of debt will not occur without approval from Council. The final payment will include the principal outstanding, interest accrual to date and the premium cost for breaking the loan contract. The decision to pay off a loan will be based on economic viability and will be analysed on a case to case basis.

Financial Controls and Sustainability Indicators

The Town will manage its debt within the minimum and maximum targets set for the two ratios listed below.

1. Debt Service Cover Ratio

This ratio is the measurement of a local government's ability to repay its debt including lease payments. The higher the ratio is, the easier it is for a local government to obtain a loan.

The DSCR is calculated as follows:-

$$DSCR = \frac{\text{Annual Operating Surplus BEFORE Interest \& Depreciation}}{\text{Principal \& Interest}}$$

The Town will maintain a Debt Service Cover Ratio (DSCR) of 200% as a basic standard, as stated in the Department of Local Government Operational Guidelines 18. An advanced standard is achieved if the ratio is greater than 500%.

2. Net Debt to Revenue Ratio

The Net Debt to Revenue ratio measures a Local Government's overall debt situation by netting the value of a Council's liabilities and debts with its cash and other similar liquid assets.

The Net Debt Ratio is calculated as follows:-

$$\text{Net Debt Ratio} = \frac{\text{Net Debt}}{\text{Operating Revenue}}$$

The Department of Local Government recommends a maximum of 50%. The Town's maximum target (debt ceiling) for this ratio will be 50%.

Definitions

Nil.

Relevant legislation	*Local Government Act 1995* Part 6 Division 5 Subdivision 3 – Borrowings s. 6.20 – 6.24.
Delegated authority	
Business unit	Financial Services
Directorate	Corporate Services

Governance to complete this section			
Version Control	Version No.	Resolution No.	Adoption date
	V01 V02	201516/194 CM202021/102	23 March 2016 16 December 2020
Review frequency	Annually		

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