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## Sustainable focus for 2018-19 Council budget

July 2, 2018  
COOKTOWN

Renewing existing infrastructure and maintaining services are the priority for a conservative 2018-19 Cook Shire Council budget, adopted at last week's special meeting.

Cook Shire Mayor Peter Scott said Council was conscious of the rising cost of living and needed to maintain the current level of services while not increasing charges where possible. General land rates have gone up by 3 per cent, while sewerage, rubbish collection and water charges remain unchanged.

Council's budgeted operating revenue is \$23.5 million with almost 50 per cent from Government grants, with a budgeted operating expenditure of \$31.8 million. "On paper looking at those two figures, we are in the red by \$8.3 million, however the expenditure also includes \$10.3 million in depreciation," Cr Scott said. "\$6.4 million of that is attributable to our vast road network, without which we would have a much smaller budget deficit of \$1.9 million." Cr Scott said while depreciation was supposed to be backed by cash, the Shire's roads repair liability was largely covered by National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements funding, which was budgeted at \$20 million for this year. "Another major portion of our operation expenditure is employee costs, with Council being one of the major employers in our region, either directly or indirectly," he said. "Employee costs account for 34 per cent of our operating expenditure, or \$10.7 million."

Cr Scott said the capital works program for the coming financial year was conservative, and focused on bringing existing assets up to standard, while creating work and business opportunities. "The Cooktown waterfront project will be finalised, and is a real asset for the community in terms of both economic and social development," he said. "Major projects include \$6.5 million for roadworks, bridges, culverts and footpaths, \$2.3 million for water and wastewater and \$700,000 for building upgrades in Cooktown and Coen."

A budget snapshot will be published in this paper, and the full budget documents and snapshot will also be available on Council's website this week.

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