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Minutes

Chair Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)

Councillors Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)

Councillor David Blore

Councillor Peter Davis

Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne

Councillor Jillian Merkel

Councillor Nathan Tolliday

In attendance Robert Barber Acting Chief Executive Officer

Jane Archbold Manager Community

Adrian Gasperoni Manager Assets and Infrastructure

Greg Robertson Manager Facilities and Information Technology

Cameron Gray Audit and Risk Committee Chair

Jess Pendergast Governance Coordinator

Opening and Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair opened the meeting at 6pm and recited the following Acknowledgement of Country.

We, the Benalla Rural City Council, acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.

Apologies

It is noted that Councillor Peter Davis has applied for a leave of absence from 1 September 2025 to 15 September 2025.

It is noted that Councillor Bernie Hearn has applied for a leave of absence from 24 September 2025 to 5 October 2025.

Cr King / Cr Tolliday:

1. That the apology be noted.
2. That the leave of absence from Councillor Peter Davis be accepted.
3. That the leave of absence from Councillor Bernie Hearn be accepted.

Carried

Statement of Commitment

The Councillors recited the following Statement of Commitment:

I declare,

that as a Councillor of Benalla Rural City

I will undertake on every occasion

to carry out my duties in the best interests of the community

and that my conduct shall maintain the standards of our Model Councillor Code of Conduct

so that I may faithfully represent

and uphold the trust placed in the Council

by the people of Benalla and District.

Governance Matters

The Council Meeting was conducted in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Benalla Rural City Council Governance Rules 2020*.

Recording of Council Meetings

In accordance with Rule 6.4 of the *Governance Rules 2020* the Council Meeting was livestreamed via the Council's website and an audio recording was made of the proceedings.

Members of the public can watch the recorded live streamed of the meeting at **www.benalla.vic.gov.au**

Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

See item 9.1.

Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were circulated to Councillors and posted on the Council website **www.benalla.vic.gov.au** pending confirmation at this meeting.

Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:

That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 6 August 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Carried



1. Public Question Time

It is noted that Tony James submitted the following questions:

I recently heard that the electric vehicles used by the mayor and CEO have been replaced with 4x4 vehicles. I understand that decisions like this can be complex, but as a resident, I am curious about the impact this change might have. I'd like to respectfully ask the following:

- 1. What were the reasons for this decision to move away from electric vehicles, especially given the environmental and financial benefits they typically offer?*
- 2. Can you provide a breakdown of the additional costs associated with switching from the electric vehicles to 4x4 vehicles, including any differences in fuel, maintenance, and leasing or purchase costs?*


The Acting Chief Executive Officer answered that due to limited battery ranges and a lack of charging station infrastructure, the electric vehicles were found to be suitable for urban use, however, they were not suited to a rural municipality where users drive long distances. There was also a limited selection of affordable models designed for use on rural roads. As such, the electric vehicles were recently replaced with diesel vehicles. One of the electric vehicles was transferred to Council's motor vehicle fleet and the other sold.

No breakdown of additional costs can be provided as a detailed financial comparison was not undertaken as vehicles were replaced for operational reasons not financial.

Cr King / Cr Merkel:

That the questions and answers be noted.

Carried



2. Petitions

No petitions were submitted to the meeting.

Record of Committees

3.1 Recommendations from Finance and Planning Committee

The recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 27 August 2025 were presented.

Cr Merkel / Cr Blore:

That the recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 27 August 2025 be adopted.

Carried

3.2 Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees

The record of Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees for July and August 2025 were presented.

Copies of the Minutes from the following meetings were provided to councillors under separate cover.

July and August 2025

16 July 2025	Assembly of Councillors – Business Review
23 July 2025	Communications Advisory Committee
28 July 2025	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee
30 July 2025	Assembly of Councillors – Business Review
5 August 2025	Benalla Airport Advisory Committee
11 August 2025	Benalla Local Safety and Traffic Liaison Committee
11 August 2025	Benalla Art Gallery Advisory Committee
14 August 2025	Benalla Festival Advisory Committee
19 August 2025	Audit and Risk Committee
20 August 2025	Assembly of Councillors – Business Review

Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:

That the report be noted.

Carried

Officer Reports

4.1 Audit and Risk Committee Chair Report

The report presented a summary of the Audit and Risk Committee's 2024/25 activities.

Cr King / Cr Gunaratne:

That the *Audit and Risk Committee Chair Report* be accepted.

Carried

4.2 Capital Works Program Status as at 30 June 2025

The report presented an update on the Capital Works Program as at 30 June 2025.

Cr Blore / Cr King:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.3 Assets and Infrastructure Department Activity Report For The Year Ended 30 June 2025

The report presented the activities of the Assets and Infrastructure department for the quarter ended 30 June 2025.

Cr Blore / Cr Merkel:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.4 2025/26 Quick Response Grants Program

The report presented funding applications for 2025/26 Quick Response Grants.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr King:

- 1. That a \$750 grant from the *2025/2026 Quick Response Grant program* be awarded to the Cake Decorators Association Victoria – Benalla Branch.**
- 2. That a \$650 grant from the *2025/2026 Quick Response Grant program* be awarded to the North Eastern Archers Inc.**

Carried

4.5 Draft CP 14 Councillor Confidentiality Policy

The report presents the draft *CP 14 Councillor Confidentiality Policy*.

Cr King / Cr Blore:

- 1. That *CP 14 Councillor Confidentiality Policy* be adopted.**
- 2. That *CP 14 Councillor Confidentiality Policy* be reviewed in September 2029.**

Carried

4.6 Councillor Policies For Review

The report presents the reviewed and updated *CP 08 Professional Development for Councillors Policy*, *CP 15 Councillor Resources and Reimbursement Policy*, *CP 37 Councillor Staff Interaction Policy* and *CP 38 Councillor Gift Policy*.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr Merkel:

That the following Council Policies be adopted and reviewed in September 2029:

- ***CP 08 Professional Development for Councillors Policy***
- ***CP 15 Councillor Resources and Reimbursement Policy***
- ***CP 37 Councillor Staff Interaction Policy.***

Carried

4.7 Mayor and Councillors' Attendance At Conferences and Events

The Mayor and Councillors attendance at meetings and events for the period 28 July 2025 to 31 August 2025 were presented.

It is noted that:

- Cr Puna Gunaratne did not attend the meeting with Her Excellency the Governor – The Honourable Margaret Gardner on 12 August 2025.
- Cr Justin King did not attend the Councillors Community Engagement session in Bridge Street, Benalla on 28 August 2025.

Cr Merkel / Cr Tolliday:

That the report be noted.


Carried

4.8 Council Actions Pending

Council Actions Pending were presented.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:

That the report be noted.

Carried

5. Reports by Councillors

Cr Bernie Hearn (Mayor) reported on her attendance at:

- 2025 Benalla Fire Bridge Presentation Dinner on Saturday 31 July.
- The meeting and tour of local Benalla facilities with Her Excellency the Governor – The Honourable Margaret Gardner with Cr Justin King on Tuesday 12 August 2025.
- Farmers Day Out Event celebrating and supporting our local farming families on Saturday 23 August 2025.

Cr Justin King (Deputy Mayor) reported on his attendance at:

- Hands on Trade Career Expo and Networking Lunch on Thursday 14 August 2025.
- Benalla Festival Advisory Committee meeting on Thursday 14 August 2025. The 2025 Benalla Festival will be held from 1 to 10 November 2025.

Cr David Blore reported on his attendance at:

- Victorian Greenhouse Alliances State Conference held in Melbourne on Saturday 23 August 2025.

Cr Jillian Merkel reported on her attendance at:

- GenderWorks Free From Violence training on Thursday 7 August 2025.

Cr Nathan Tolliday reported on his attendance at:

- L2P Car Launch at Benalla Toyota on Saturday 31 July 2025.

Cr King / Cr Merkel:

That the reports be noted.

Carried



6. Notices of Motion

No notices of motion were presented.

7. Notices of Rescission Motion

No notices of rescission motion were presented.

8. Urgent Business

No urgent business was submitted to the meeting.

Confidential Business

It was proposed that the following items be considered in confidential business pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2020* as they contain personal information or private commercial information that would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about a person, their personal affairs or expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking if released:

9.1 Tender Report for CM25.056 Building and Amenities Cleaning Service 2025-27

9.2 Confidential Reports by Councillors

9.3 Confidential Council Actions Pending

Cr King / Cr Blore:

That the meeting be closed to the public for the consideration of the confidential business item noted above pursuant to Sections 3(1) and Section 66(2)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Carried

The meeting was closed to the public at 6.55pm.



10. Reopening of the meeting to the public

Cr Tolliday / Cr Blore:

That the meeting be reopened to the public.

Carried

The meeting was reopened to the public at 7.06pm.

Closure of the meeting

The Council Meeting closed at 7.06pm.

The minutes were confirmed on the fifteenth day of October 2025.

Signed: 

Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn