

Benalla Rural City Council

Council Meeting

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 4 March 2026

Venue: Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room)
13 Mair Street, Benalla

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Minutes

Chair	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
Councillors	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Vince Branigan	
	Councillor Peter Davis	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
In attendance	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate
	Jane Archbold	Manager Community
	Cathy Fitzpatrick	Manager Finance
	Adrian Gasperoni	Manager Assets and Infrastructure
	Nilesh Singh	Manager Development
	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

No apologies were submitted to the meeting.

It is noted that Councillor Bernie Hearn requested a leave of absence from Thursday 2 April 2026 to Monday 27 April 2026.

It is noted that Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne requested a leave of absence from Thursday 5 March 2026 to Thursday 19 March 2026.

Cr King / Cr Blore:

- 1. That a leave of absence be granted to Councillor Bernie Hearn from Thursday 2 April 2026 to Monday 27 April 2026.**
- 2. That a leave of absence be granted to Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne from Thursday 5 March 2026 to Thursday 19 March 2026.**

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 is 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 broadcast of the meeting at **www.benalla.vic.gov.au**

Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

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

Cr Davis / Cr Gunaratne:

That the Minutes of the Council Meetings held on Wednesday 17 December 2025 and Wednesday 4 February 2026 be confirmed as true and accurate records of the meetings.

Carried



1. Public Question Time

No questions were submitted to the meeting.

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 18 February 2026 were presented.

Cr King / Cr Merkel:

That the recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 18 February 2026 be adopted.

Carried

3.2 Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees

Under Council's *Governance Rules 2020* the Chief Executive Officer is required to provide a written record of the Assemblies of Councillors at a scheduled Council Meeting.

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

Cr Merkel / Cr Davis:

That the report be noted.

Carried

Officer Reports

4.1 Financial Report For The Half Year Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the financial results compared to budget for the quarter ended 31 December 2025 and presents outcomes from the 2025/26 half-year budget review.

Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:
That the report be noted.

Carried

4.2 Finance Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented an overview of the functions of the Finance Department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr King / Cr Davis:
That the report be noted.

Carried

Cr King / Cr Gunaratne:

That items 4.3 Capital Works Program Status as at 31 December 2025 and 4.4 Assets and Infrastructure Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025 on the agenda be considered after item 4.14 Council Actions Pending.

Carried

4.5 People and Performance Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activities of the People and Performance Department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr Merkel / Cr Blore:
That the report be noted.

Carried

4.6 Community Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activities of the Community Department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr King / Cr Blore:
That the report be noted.

Carried

4.7 Facilities and Information Technology Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activities of the Facilities and Information Technology Department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr Davis / Cr Merkel:
That the report be noted.

Carried

4.8 Development Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activities of the Development department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:
That the report be noted.

Carried

4.9 Economic Development and Sustainability Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activity of the Economic Development and Sustainability Department for the quarter ending 31 December 2025.

Cr King / Cr Blore:
That the report be noted.

Carried



Carried

4.10 Appointment of Councillor Representatives to Advisory Committees, Peak Industry Bodies and Regional and Community-Based Committees

The report presented proposed nominations of Council representatives for appointments to various committees, peak industry bodies and regional and community organisations for 2025/26.

Advisory Committee	Current 2025/26 Representatives	Nominated 2025/26 Representatives	Number of representatives in accordance with Terms of Reference	Officer	Meetings
Benalla Festival Advisory Committee	Cr Justin King Cr Jillian Merkel	Cr Justin King Cr Jillian Merkel Cr Vince Branigan	Up to three Councillor representatives	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability	Monthly or as required 4pm Tuesday

Cr King / Cr Davis:

That Cr Justin King, Cr Jillian Merkel and Cr Vince Branigan be appointed as Councillor representatives on the Benalla Festival Advisory Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Carried

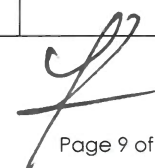
Advisory Committee	Current 2025/26 Representatives	Nominated 2025/26 Representatives	Number of representatives in accordance with Terms of Reference	Officer	Meetings
Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee	Cr Jillian Merkel Cr Puna Gunaratne	Cr Jillian Merkel Cr Vince Branigan	Up to two Councillor representatives	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability	Monthly 5.30pm Monday

Cr Gunaratne / Cr King:

That Cr Jillian Merkel and Cr Vince Branigan be appointed as Councillor representatives on the Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Carried

Advisory Committee	Current 2025/26 Representatives	Nominated 2025/26 Representatives	Number of representatives in accordance with Terms of Reference	Officer	Meetings
Communications Advisory Committee	Mayor Cr David Blore Cr Peter Davis	Mayor Cr David Blore Cr Peter Davis Cr Puna Gunaratne	The Mayor and Councillor representatives as determined by the Council.	Chief Executive Officer	Monthly 1.30pm Wednesday.



Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:

That Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn, Cr David Blore, Cr Peter Davis and Cr Puna Gunaratne be appointed as Councillor representatives on the Communications Advisory Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Carried

External Incorporated	Current 2025/26 Representative	Nominated 2025/26 Representative	Number of representatives in accordance with Terms of Reference	Officer	Meetings
Benalla Family Research Group	Cr David Blore	Cr Vince Branigan	Not specified.	Chief Executive Officer	Monthly 11am Wednesday

Cr Blore / Cr Davis:

That Cr Vince Branigan be appointed as the Councillor representative on the Benalla Family Research Group for the 2025/26 Council year.

Carried

External Working Groups	Current 2025/26 Representatives	Nominated 2025/26 Representatives	Number of representatives in accordance with Terms of Reference	Officer	Meetings
Benalla Local Safety and Traffic Liaison Committee	Cr David Blore Cr Bernie Hearn	Cr David Blore Cr Bernie Hearn Cr Puna Gunaratne	Not specified	Manager Assets and Infrastructure	Bi-monthly 2pm Monday

Cr King / Cr Blore:

That Cr David Blore and Cr Bernie Hearn be appointed as Councillor representatives on the Benalla Local Safety and Traffic Liaison Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Carried

A division of the vote was called.

Votes recorded in favour of the motion:

Cr Bernie Hearn
Cr Justin King
Cr David Blore
Cr Vince Branigan
Cr Peter Davis
Cr Jillian Merkel

Votes recorded against the motion:

Cr Gunaratne

The motion was **carried**.

Statutory Committees	Current 2025/26 Representatives	Nominated 2025/26 Representative/s	Number of representatives in accordance with Audit and Risk Committee Charter	Officer	Meetings
Audit and Risk Committee	Cr David Blore (Chair of F&P Committee) Cr Puna Gunaratne	Cr David Blore Cr Puna Gunaratne Cr Peter Davis	Up to two Councillor representatives.	General Manager Corporate	4 times a year. 3 rd Tuesday of month.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr King:

That standing orders be suspended to allow for discussion on the councillor representative nominations to the Audit and Risk Committee.

Carried

Standing orders were suspended at 7.12pm.

Cr King / Cr Davis:

That standing orders resume.

Carried

Standing orders resumed at 7.15pm.

Cr Gunaratne / :

That Cr David Blore and Cr Puna Gunaratne be appointed as Councillor representatives to the Audit and Risk Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Motion Lapsed

Cr King / Merkel:

That Cr David Blore and Cr Peter Davis be appointed as Councillor representatives to the Audit and Risk Committee for the 2025/26 Council year.

Motion Lapsed

4.11 Chief Executive Officer Credit Card Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report detailed expenditure associated with the corporate credit card issued to the Chief Executive Officer for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That the report be noted.

Carried



4.12 Councillors Expenses For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report detailed expenditure associated with Councillors' mobile phone usage, attendance at professional development courses, conferences and seminars, and reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Cr King / Cr Merkel:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.13 Mayor and Councillors' Attendance At Conferences and Events

The Mayor and Councillors attendance at meetings and events as detailed during the period from 8 December 2025 to 22 February 2026 were presented.

Cr Davis / Cr Blore:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.14 Council Actions Pending

Council Actions Pending are detailed in **Appendix 1**.

Cr King / Cr Gunaratne:

That the report be noted.

Carried

Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:

That with the appearance of the Manager Assets and Infrastructure, Items *4.3 Capital Works Program Status as at 31 December 2025* and *4.4 Assets and Infrastructure Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025* now be considered after item listed as *8 Urgent Business*.

Carried

5. Reports by Councillors

Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn reported on her attendance at:

- Baddaginnie Australia Day community breakfast on Monday 26 January 2026.
- Benalla Australia Day community breakfast and presentations on Monday 26 January 2026.
- Benalla Rural City Australia Day awards and citizenship ceremony on Monday 26 January 2026.

Deputy Mayor Cr Justin King reported on his attendance at:

- Official opening of the Winton Café on Thursday 12 February 2026.
- Goomalibee Thank You Celebration night on Saturday 14 February 2026.

Cr David Blore reported on his attendance at:

- Goomalibee Thank You Celebration night on Saturday 14 February 2026.

Cr Vince Branigan reported on his attendance at:

- Annual Student Exhibition launch at the Benalla Pop Up Art Gallery on Monday 26 January 2026.

Cr Peter Davis reported on his attendance at:

- Lima and Swanpool Australia Day community morning tea and presentations on Monday 26 January 2026.
- Benalla Rural City Australia Day awards and citizenship ceremony on Monday 26 January 2026.
- Goomalibee Australia Day community BBQ and presentations on Monday 26 January 2026.

Cr Puna Gunaratne reported on his attendance at:

- Goomalibee Thank You Celebration night on Saturday 14 February 2026.
- Benalla Migrants Association Luna New Year celebrations on Saturday 28 February 2026.

Cr Jillian Merkel reported on:

- Upcoming 2026 Benalla Street Art Festival. The festival will be held in Benalla Rural City on 17 to 19 April 2026.

Cr King / Cr Blore:

That the reports be noted.

Carried



6. Notices of Motion

6.1 Notice of Motion: Improved Parking Layout at Benalla Railway Station

Councillor David Blore submitted the following motion.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That standing orders be suspended to allow for discussion on item 6.1 Notice of Motion: Improved Parking Layout at Benalla Railway Station.

Carried

Standing orders were suspended at 7.31pm.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That standing orders resumed.

Carried

Standing orders resumed at 7.40pm.

Cr Blore / Cr King:

1. That Council notes the following:

- a. Rail travellers have enjoyed direct and immediate access to the Benalla Railway Station building and platform for well over a century.
- b. The current Inland Rail project will result in loss of this direct access. Disabled passengers will no longer enjoy the previous accessibility by way of the drop-off zone at the entrance and convenient parking spaces within 10 metres of the platform.
- c. Disabled parking spaces are now to be a minimum of 35 metres away. Public transport parking (buses and taxis) is further removed.
- d. The design for the station provides for substantial open space directly outside the station entrance. The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) (article in the Benalla Ensign dated 14 January 2026) is reported as asserting that the shift was driven by the community's desire for open space.
- e. A recent response letter from former members of the Benalla Working Group (BWG) established by the ARTC in 2020 rejected this assertion, stating that in the deliberations of the BWG it was never an either open space or parking situation immediately outside the station building.
- f. Substantial opportunities for open space development will be available for ARTC after the southern rail track and former Express Passenger Train (XPT) platform is removed, without impinging on opportunities for an improved parking layout.
- g. Provision of disabled parking spaces together with improved provision for emergency vehicle and public transport access can be readily achieved by using the existing concrete and asphalt pavement immediately in front of the station entrance.
- h. The proposed change will result in cost savings through not requiring current pavement to be excavated.

2. That the Council notes that the new northern platform to be developed as part of this project will experience significant passenger movements. A new northside car park for all patrons including public transport and disabled users will enhance the functionality and community acceptance of the changes.
3. That the Council has the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to write to the ARTC CEO (copies to Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Catherine King, State Minister for Transport Sonia Kilkeny, Annabelle Cleeland MLA, Member for Euroa and Helen Haines MP, Independent Member for Indi) in terms of the above points.

Carried

7. Notices of Rescission Motion

No notices of rescission motion were submitted.

8. Urgent Business

No urgent business was submitted.

Officer Reports

4.3 Capital Works Program Status as at 31 December 2025

The report presented an update on the Capital Works Program as at 31 December 2025.

Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:

That the report be noted.

Carried

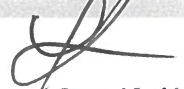
4.4 Assets and Infrastructure Department Activity Report For The Quarter Ended 31 December 2025

The report presented the activities of the Assets and Infrastructure Department for the quarter ended 31 December 2025.

Cr King / Cr Blore:

That the report be noted.

Carried



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 and private commercial information that would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about a person, their personal affairs and expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking if released:

- 9.1 Tender Report For Contract CM26.042 Culdesac Drainage Improvement Works
- 9.2 Tender Report For Contract CM26.029 Supply and Delivery of a Motor Grader
- 9.3 Confidential Reports by Councillors
- 9.4 Confidential Council Actions Pending

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That the meeting be closed to the public in accordance with Sections 3(1) and Section 66(2)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020* for the following items:

- 9.1 **Tender Report For Contract CM26.042 Culdesac Drainage Improvement Works**
Item 9.1 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to private commercial information.
- 9.2 **Tender Report For Contract CM26.029 Supply and Delivery of a Motor Grader**
Item 9.2 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to private commercial information.
- 9.3 **Confidential Reports by Councillors**
Item 9.4 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to council business information, being information that council prejudice Council's position.
- 9.4 **Confidential Council Actions Pending**
Item 9.5 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to private commercial information.

Carried

The meeting was closed to the public at 8.20pm.



9.1 Tender Report For Contract CM26.042 Culdesac Drainage Improvement Works

The report considered tenders submitted for contact *CM26.042 The Culdesac Drainage Improvements*.

Cr Davis / Cr Blore:

The motion for Item 9.1 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to private commercial information.

Carried

9.2 Tender Report For Contract CM26.029 Supply and Delivery of a Motor Grader

The report considered tenders submitted for contact *CM26.029 Supply and Delivery of a Motor Grader*.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

The motion for Item 9.2 is confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to private commercial information.

Carried

A division of the vote was called.

Votes recorded in favour of the motion:

Cr Bernie Hearn

Cr Justin King

Cr Peter Davis

Cr Jillian Merkel

Votes recorded against the motion:

Cr David Blore

Cr Vince Branigan

Cr Puna Gunaratne

The motion was **carried**.



9.3 Confidential Reports by Councillors

No confidential reports were presented from Councillors.

9.4 Confidential Council Actions Pending

Confidential Council Actions Pending were presented.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:
That the report be noted.

Carried



10. Reopening of the meeting to the public

Cr Davis / Cr Branigan:

That the meeting be reopened to the public.

Carried

The meeting was reopened to the public at 8.36pm.

Closure of the meeting

The meeting closed at 8.36pm.

The minutes were confirmed on the twenty second day of April 2026.

Signed: _____

Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn

DPT MAYOR JUSTIN KING

