



Cost Shifting 2023: How State Costs Eat Council Rates

Report Summary and Highlights



President's Foreword



It is with great concern that I present to you Local Government NSW's latest commissioned research on one of the most significant problems facing NSW councils today.

Cost Shifting 2023: How State Costs Eat Council Rates, by independent consultants Morrison Low, reveals the heavy financial burden carried by NSW councils and communities forced to assume ever-greater responsibility for state government services and infrastructure.

That burden is now valued at more than \$1.36 billion per year, up 78 per cent from \$820 million per year in just over five years.

It's fair to say that all levels of government – like families – are doing it tough.

But the difference is that with cost shifting, the financial pressure flows downhill – from the federal level to state governments, onwards to councils.

And of course ultimately to ratepayers, because councils must divert rate revenue away from existing services and infrastructure in order to fund the unrecoverable cost of the services, programs and functions imposed by the State Government.

This new report calculates that the total amount of cost-shifting to councils now represents an average of around \$460 per ratepayer, per year.

Councils are the closest level of government to the community and we see firsthand the very real impact of this endless financial squeeze.

We carry the can, as other levels of government wipe costs from their budgets by eating into ours. And we face the community to answer for rate increases, reduced services or degraded local infrastructure.

It is, quite simply, unsustainable and cannot continue.

After decades of advocacy by the local government sector, I welcomed the Minns' Government acknowledgement that the current funding system is broken. And I am more encouraged than I can say by their commitment to undertake a review of the financial modelling of councils.

LGNSW looks forward to contributing to this review, and to ensure that one of its key focuses will be to address this damaging practice, and drive a more financially sustainable future for the people of NSW.

Cr Darrlea Turley AM
LGNSW President

What is Cost Shifting?

Cost shifting occurs when state and federal governments force councils to assume responsibility for infrastructure, services and regulatory functions without providing sufficient supporting funding.

NSW councils are currently being asked to absorb cost shifting worth more than \$1.36 billion each year, with the practice imposing an estimated cumulative burden of more than \$10.15 billion over the last decade.

This now amounts to an average \$460.67 paid by each NSW ratepayer, each and every year.

As councils work to rebuild their communities in the wake of the COVID pandemic and repeated natural disasters, they also find themselves grappling with the same economic challenges and headwinds impacting the State and Federal Governments. The difficult economic climate, rising costs and severe skills and labour shortages are impacting council budgets and affecting service and infrastructure delivery in local communities. The continual shifting of the obligations and costs for State (or Federal) functions and services onto local government, coupled with a defective rate peg system, is only making the situation worse.

Cost shifting onto local government remains one of the most significant challenges facing NSW councils today. The unrelenting growth of cost shifting to councils is increasingly eroding any possibility of financially sustainable local government and risking the capacity of councils to both deliver tailored, grassroots services to their communities and properly maintain vital local infrastructure.

Alarming, the latest research commissioned by LGNSW shows that the increase in cost shifting has been accelerated by various NSW Government policies.



Analysis by independent consultants Morrison Low calculated the total cost shifted onto councils in the 2021/22 financial year at \$1.36 billion.



This is a dramatic increase of 78 per cent since the 2015/16 financial year, when the total cost shift was estimated at \$820 million.



In 2021/22, each NSW ratepayer had the equivalent of \$460.67 of their paid rates eaten by state government costs.



The proportion of council rates subsumed by cost-shifted obligations ranged from \$420.90 for ratepayers on the metropolitan fringes to \$590.80 for rural ratepayers.

\$1.36 Billion

Cost shift to councils per annum

\$460.67

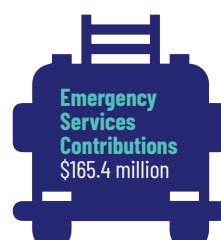
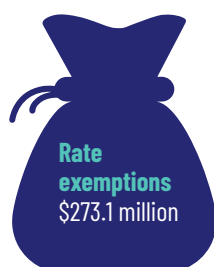
Per ratepayer per year

What is eating council rates?

The largest direct cost shift to councils is from emergency service contributions and other emergency service obligations, totalling \$165.4 million. However, the cost of rate exemptions is higher still, representing a total of \$273.1 million of potential rates that are exempted and redistributed to other ratepayers to pay. An additional \$288.2 million in waste levies are passed onto the ratepayers through the waste collection fees in their rates bill.

A further \$156.7 million in costs for libraries is also being covered by councils to make up the difference between the committed funding for councils' libraries and the subsidies received.

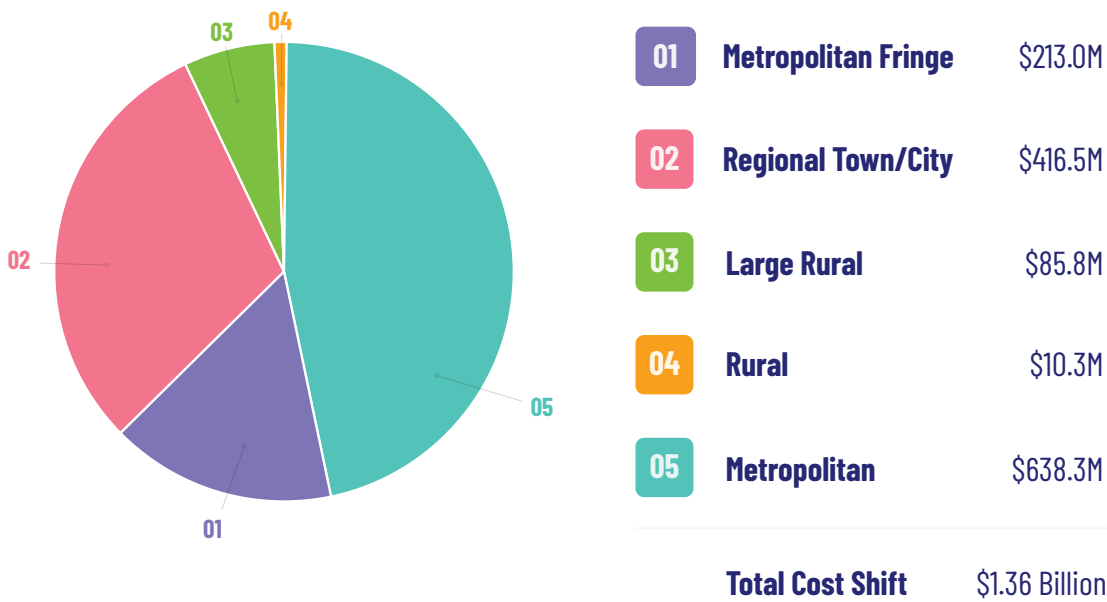
Top Five Cost Shifts onto NSW Councils



Cost shift per ratepayer per year by council classification



Total cost shift per year by council classification



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