I went looking for waste. What I found surprised me.

By Cr Douglas Hall

When I joined the Dunedin City Council, I went hunting for the wasteful spending we hear so much about in the media and on Facebook. Surely there would be a mountain of obvious things to cut?

To my surprise, I have found it much harder to identify than I expected. That doesn't mean every dollar is justified. It means we should understand what we are paying for before calling it waste.

Take Three Waters. Dunedin's overall rates increase for 2026/27 is 8.9%.

Water-related rates funding is rising 16.7%, compared with 4.3% for other council activities. Nearly seven in every ten extra dollars of budgeted rates revenue is associated with water.

That pays for a lot more than the water from your tap. Dunedin has around 1,742 kilometres of drinking-water pipes, 927 kilometres of wastewater pipes and 393 kilometres of stormwater pipes. That's over 3,000 kilometres beneath our feet, before we count reservoirs, pumps and treatment plants.

A COFFEE-SIZED SHARE OF THE RATES BUDGET

Where would your $6.50 go?

Proportional allocation of 2026/27 budgeted rates funding, not gross spending.



$6.50

One coffee. Three major allocations.

$2.58 39.7%	$0.96 14.8%	$2.96 45.5%
Three Waters Drinking water, wastewater, stormwater	**Roading and footpaths** Roads, footpaths, bridges	**Everything else** All other council services

What's inside the $2.96 for everything else?

A breakdown of the 45.5% of rates that funds all other council services.

9.1% $0.59	8.8% $0.57	8.0% $0.52	6.0% $0.39	5.5% $0.36	3.8% $0.25	4.3% $0.28
Governance and support	**City properties**	**Community recreation**	**Waste minimisation**	**Arts and culture**	**Regulatory services**	**Other city services**
Democracy, staff, IT, customer service, finance	Community housing, property, venues and parking	Parks, reserves, pools, playgrounds and gardens	Rubbish collection, recycling and closed landfill management	Libraries, museums, public art, events and cultural support	Building, resource consents, animal management and enforcement	Planning, economic development, community grants and other activities

Based on 2026/27 rates funding of $288.114m. Shares are illustrative, not an individual property bill.

DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL | VALUE FOR MONEY



What does value for money really mean?

Why is so much coming due at once? It's a confluence of events: ageing infrastructure, renewals that cannot wait forever, higher construction costs, flood resilience and changing standards. Central government's water reforms add requirements, but Wellington didn't make our pipes old overnight. Some of these bills have been building for years.

And it isn't just water. The council maintains around 1,076 kilometres of sealed roads, 681 kilometres of unsealed roads, 983 kilometres of footpaths and cycleways combined, and 251 bridges. Then there are libraries, pools, parks, museums and rubbish collection.

I worry about the idea that we can simply cut, cut, cut our way out of every problem. Dunedin deserves nice things. We want a city where people choose to live, work, raise families and build their futures. We won't achieve that by cutting everything to the bone. But every dollar should still deliver real value.

The way forward is to work together to get the best from the money we do spend. Council staff are ratepayers too. They live here and want Dunedin to succeed just as much as the rest of us. We can question decisions and push for better outcomes while respecting the people who deliver our services.

What one person calls a "nice-to-have", another may rely on every week. We won't all agree on every priority, and no budget should be beyond scrutiny. I'm still looking for waste. But my question has changed: not just "What does it cost?" but "What are we getting, and can we do it better?" That's value for money.

For more information go to: **www.doughall.nz**

Authorised by Doug Hall doughall@dcc.govt.nz