

Rate rise tipped after poll

By Alison Mills

RATEPAYERS may have to wait until after the March 24 election to find out whether Hawkesbury City Council plans to impose a rate increase next financial year.

Cr Christine Paine's motion for the council to consider a "moderate rate increase of 6 per cent above the rate pegging limit" was lost eight votes to four.

"This time last year we were in full swing with the 43 per cent [rise over four years] but this year we're not talking about it," Cr Paine said at last Tuesday's meeting. "The community will go with something moderate. If we leave it to the end of March [the Government's deadline] it's going to be too late."

Council support services director Peter Jackson said the rise would be 1 per cent when the 5 per cent stormwater levy stopped at the end of June.

General manager Graeme Faulkner said the council would be "looking at a \$700,000 deficit next [financial] year and we'll start looking at the budget in the next couple of weeks".

Ruth Hart reports on a man with the heart of a giant.

Legless, he takes on the world

INSPIRATIONAL speaker John Coutis tells audiences he is no different from them - except for the fact that he has no legs.

But this isn't strictly true. There's a lot about John Coutis that sets him apart.

His courage, for example, and humour in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, his tenacity to reach goals and his capacity to love - not only his family, but seemingly everyone he meets.

When John was born in 1969, doctors said he wouldn't last the day.

"I came out the size of a Coke can," John, now 37, says of his entry into the world.

Not only was he tiny, but he also had congenital sacral agenesis with spina bifida.

This meant that the bottom of his spine didn't develop and that his legs, which only grew to one sixth of normal size, had paraplegic symptoms.

Despite the doctors' warnings and advice from many other people, John's parents, Evelyn and Gary, took him home and raised him along-

Home-grown success

side his brothers and sister.

They taught him to walk on his hands, fought for him to go to mainstream school, toughened him up to face taunts and bullying and supported his decision in 1987 to have his legs amputated.

Most importantly, perhaps, they instilled in him the belief that he could achieve anything.

And that is just what he has done.

"Now I'm married, I have a son, I drive a car with hand controls and I do what I love, which is to motivate others to be the best they can," John said.

His speaking engagements have taken him around Australia and to Hawaii, Mauritius, South Africa, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Taiwan and China.

John had also been a great sportsman until he had a battle with cancer six years ago.

He played with an able-



An inspiration: For many years John Coutis and his skateboard were familiar figures in the Hawkesbury. John grew up in North Richmond and went to St Monica's Primary and Colo High. Last week, John shared his inspiring story with students from Hawkesbury High, including Nicholas Yardley (pictured).

Picture: Gene Ramirez

bodied Hawkesbury indoor cricket side and more than held his own in wheelchair rugby league, disabled table tennis and power lifting.

In 1994 he travelled to South Africa with the Australian cricket team and he supported the Australian Olympic team in 2000.

"I could have chosen to sit at home and do nothing but I chose to take on the world," he said.

Details: johnpcoutis.com