
Mayoral Minutes - 24 August 2021

ITEM 4.3 Emergency Financial Support - COVID19

Councillors

It pains me to tell you this. . . . and I guess you have probably already worked it out. . . but COVID is here to stay. . . . at least for a while yet.

You will recall at last month's Council meeting we approved several measures to support our community, but with the prolonged lock downs and with no clear end in sight, we must do more.

From way back in March last year when I introduced my 18-point plan until today, I am proud to say we have provided crucial support to our vulnerable ratepayers, businesses, non-for-profit organisations and the many sporting associations.

These measures have been roundly applauded but they do come with a substantial financial cost a cost in the order of some \$20m.

That said and given the pandemic uncertainty we need to look at further support.

In addition to the significant relief package announced last month, tonight, I wish to again activate Council's Emergency Event provisions outlined in its Community Grants and Events Sponsorship Policy - and propose that Council:

- Re-affirm its commitment to scrapping of the footway dining fees for the duration of the Public Health Orders (PHO);
- Re-affirm its commitment to offer an extra red bin service to residential single unit dwelling during the lockdown period;
- Re-affirm its commitment to families who opt out of sending their children to our childcare facilities during the stay at home orders by absorbing their financial gap for the duration of the PHO;
- As a result of the closure, or suspension of any Council facility or service, that Council hold in credit any fees and charges paid for the use of any facility and/or service. Importantly, where a specific user is experiencing financial hardship, then a full refund be provided;
- Given the significant impact that COVID-19 has had on all 2021 winter season sporting Associations, I propose that Council waive the seasonal ground hire fee for member clubs and their Associations for the use of their venues and/or use of our sporting fields.

The pandemic has yet again denied and/or abandoned regular competition rounds, final fixtures series and end of year presentations for participants. This initiative will enable the Association and clubs to partly deal with requests for refunds from parents and players and importantly deal with the financial pressures they themselves are contenting with;

- Further, I propose that those throughout our community who lease and/or license Council owned properties – and are financially struggling as a result of the current PHO - be similarly supported.

In managing the above, I propose that any lessee and/or licensee who has received Government support should have their rent reduced by 50% for the period commencing 1 July 2021 until the lockdown financial support ends.

The relevant Government support programs applicable in providing the reduction are:

- Commonwealth COVID-19 Disaster Payment;
- NSW COVID-19 Micro-Business Grant; and
- NSW JobSaver Payment.

Separately, it's important to also ensure that we appropriately support Ratepayers who are financially hurting due to the latest lockdown.

As a result, I also propose that Council again activate Council's Emergency Event provisions outlined in its *Rates and Charges, Debt Recovery and Hardship Assistance Policy* - and support the following eligible Ratepayers:

- *Residential Ratepayers* – those individuals that can substantiate that they are receiving support under the Commonwealth COVID-19 Disaster Payment; and
- *Business Ratepayers* – those entities that can substantiate that they are receiving support under the NSW COVID-19 Micro-Business Grant or the NSW JobSaver Payment.

Subject to meeting the above criteria and completing Council's relevant application, Ratepayers will be able to:

- Defer and/or vary instalment payments until 1 March 2022;
- Council to waive any accrued interest applicable from 1 July 2021 until 1 March 2022, though this would be subject to the Ratepayers account being brought up to-date by 30 June 2022; and
- Debt recovery action be suspended for eligible Ratepayers until 1 March 2022.

As Councillors will note, the proposed measures will ensure that those affected by this lockdown will be financially supported throughout the ensuing period. I understand that the likely impact of the above measures (around \$2M) will raise our 2021/22 COVID-19 financial impact to approximately \$5M – and bring our total impact to around \$22M since the pandemic started.

Whilst substantial, I believe it's the right thing to do in protecting our community.

I suggest Council request that the General Manager enact the above policy decisions and the likely impact on Council budget, including applying any legislative requirements to ensure that funding be made available as soon as feasibly possible.

I understand that in accordance with the Local Government Act, this will require Council to public exhibit the above support program before its implemented, though once ratified, relevant payments will be backdated as noted above.

On a separate note, I would again like to express my gratitude and well-wishes to all of Council's staff who have ensured that Council's services have continued to be carried out in an effective and safe manner throughout what has been a testing time for our organisation and community. Your unparalleled commitment and strong values reflect on the wonderful corporate citizens you are. On behalf of our Council and community, I say hats off to you and thank you from us all.

Council, I put the motion before you.