

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

11 MAY 2020

12.9 MELTON CITY COUNCIL COVID-19 PROGRAM

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Council with an overview of Council's response to date to the Covid-19 pandemic impact on the community and businesses in the City of Melton.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council note the report.

REPORT**1. Executive Summary**

The Federal Government activated the Federal Emergency Health Response Plan in February 2020 due to the emerging concerns of the CoronaVirus (Covid-19) and its rapid spread of infection in certain parts of the world. On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organisation declared Coronavirus COVID-19 a pandemic which was immediately followed by the State Government declaring Victoria to be in a State of Emergency. A first ever National Cabinet has been established to coordinate a national response. Respective Federal and State Government health and economic packages have been announced.

Having considered all financial support packages being provided by both Federal and State Governments to support members of the public as well as business owners, Council staff have formulated a position that integrates in with the offerings at both a Federal and State level but also provides in areas that other opportunities have missed.

2. Background/Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious and pressing public health, social and economic issue facing the local community. Melton already experiences a number of poor socio-economic issues across the community, and is particularly vulnerable to both the health and economic effects of an ongoing and prolonged COVID-19 crisis.

Melton staff began putting measures in place in late February and continued to elevate in accordance with official advice and information – notwithstanding the required rate of change and significance of the impacts is unprecedented and has required a complete re-prioritisation of Council's internal and external activities. The relief package that has been developed is a whole-of-council staged approach, with a focus on short term relief and direct support measures and a longer term strategy to assist the recovery of the community and local businesses.

In developing these measures, consideration has been given to various State and Federal government support and economic stimulus packages. The relief packages developed by other Councils has been of assistance to staff to ensure we are consistent with what others are putting out and ensuring that we are seen to be responding appropriately in the eyes of our community.

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Council must continue to manage its revenue streams from an intergenerational perspective so as to continue to deliver critical services and infrastructure to the community, and to ensure it does not disadvantage future generations both in any consequent borrowings or significant variations from Council's rating strategy that could compromise the Council's sustainability as a consequence. It is most important to recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic will cause significant financial hardship for some members of the community and Council can, in certain circumstances, provide assistance, however must ensure it has the resources necessary to support the community in the recovery phase.

A number of Councillors have requested that Council's ability to provide a general waiver in respect of the final instalment of 2019/20 rates be investigated as an option to provide immediate support to residential owner/occupier ratepayers. In order to do this Council must form the view that a "class" of ratepayers are in "financial hardship" as a collective. Council could then apply a general hardship waiver at a specified level to that "class" of ratepayer.

Developing the relief package it has been necessary for Council to recast its financial forecasts, and Council has deferred the Draft 2020/21 budget deliberations in order to take account of the pandemic impact, and as best it can to provide for funds to support the most vulnerable residents in need. It is not possible at this stage to accurately forecast the full economic impact of COVID- 19, therefore a degree of agility underpinned by regular financial monitoring and reporting will be required.

The relief package for Melton residents currently is as follows:

<p>Service Delivery</p> <p>Personal Care – continued for those who are most vulnerable and have no support Delivered meals (MOW) – expanded service Property Maintenance – essential safety services only Taxi support for medical appointments Care Assessments – on the phone Virtual Storytime – Library website Library e-collections available on-line with expanded offering Frozen all Library fines and extended hiring dates New Parent Groups online and are supported by new Facebook groups. Animal Registration - No follow up on reminder notices, failure to register or Domestic Animal Businesses will occur until October. No infringements being issued (Cost \$186K) Waiver of impoundment pet release fees for residents experiencing financial hardship (Est Cost \$4K)</p>
<p>Sporting Clubs</p> <p>Ceased all fees and charges for Sporting Clubs and Associations Reviewing our assistance level for Sporting Clubs and Associations that are experiencing financial hardship</p>
<p>Community Support</p> <p>For all community facilities, we are no longer taking bookings for dates within the next six weeks. Bookings are being accepted for facility hire for dates after the 1 May, however these are being treated as tentative bookings only at this stage. For providers/groups cancelling room hire, they are being provided a refund if they have already paid for the hire. All hirers, casual or ongoing have been contacted and informed of the cancellation of their bookings.</p>

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<p>All casual hirers that had paid for a booking up to 30 June 2020, that has now been cancelled, have been provided with a 100% refund.</p> <p>All bookings (ongoing or casual) have been cancelled up to 30 June 2020.</p> <p>We have put in place a new maximum room capacity limit for all bookable spaces. Room setups and seating has been adjusted to observe these limits and the social distancing model</p> <p>External third parties with room bookings can still utilise their bookings (within the social distancing guidelines) - Only if the booking of the room/space at our facility is considered a place of work and these few organisations have been advised to abide by all social distancing requirements.</p> <p>The municipal emergency response team has been meeting to enable our ability to provide assistance to community members as appropriate. The Community Care team is integral to the community facing efforts in relation to a pandemic emergency. Ceased all Council delivered community events and programs.</p>
<p>Local Business Support</p> <p>Free A-Frames provided to cafes and restaurants in retail precincts to promote they are open for business</p> <p>Open for Business Campaign - weekly newspaper ads in the Star Weekly. (\$25K)</p> <p>Venture Melton Business Network – free membership (\$79,200)</p> <p>Planning fees waived for six months relating to commercial use and development</p> <p>Waiver of 2020/21 business permit renewal fees \$540k (Food Act renewals, Street Trader, Outdoor Dining Permits, A Frame Permits and Health Act)</p> <p>Amenity Protection – Waived Street Trader Permits (\$4k)</p> <p>Relaxed Parking enforcement (Revenue loss \$90k / month)</p> <p>Health & Building - Food & Health Registrations have been waived (\$380k)</p> <p>Added 6 extra immunisation sessions for eligible residents to attend for influenza vaccination.</p>
<p>Financial Support</p> <p>COVID-19 Financial Assistance Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waiver of interest on rates (To date cost \$160k) - Relax deferral rates and charges - suspension of all legal action for rates & charges

3. Council and Wellbeing Plan Reference and Policy Reference

The Melton City Council 2017-2021 Council and Wellbeing Plan references:

1. A proud, inclusive and safe community: A City of people leading happy and healthy lives

1.2 *A safe and equitable community.*

4. Financial Considerations

The financial implications for the program being offered are still being calculated but the isolation rules also have seen the ceasing of any functions, events, and gatherings which

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has led to savings. This also includes not hosting training and development classes through the neighbourhood houses.

The general "hardship waiver" referred to above for residential owner occupied properties would cost an additional \$4million approx. for each \$100 in value.

5. Consultation/Public Submissions

The Melton Council COVID-19 Crisis Management Team has been meeting and working daily on this issue, and has been responsible for engaging and consulting internally and externally in relation to the development of its Response & Recovery Strategy.

Council have been informed as to the active program to contact businesses to establish what support is required. Sporting and Service Clubs have also been spoken to about Council's desire to work with them during these challenging times

6. Risk Analysis

The risks and challenges associated with what needs to be done in this response environment is considered and addressed daily via the Crisis Management Team. A recovery team has been meeting infrequently to ensure it is capable of meeting any immediate needs going forward.

7. Options

Staff believe that all immediate and foreseen needs are being worked through and addressed via the Crisis Management Team.

The provision of specific relief to ratepayers through a form of general hardship waiver in respect of the 4th instalment of 2019/20 rates can be incorporated into the package should Council so determine.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Nil