

ITEM 8.2	COVID-19 BUSINESS SUPPORT PLAN AND COMMUNITY CARE PACKAGE
REPORTING MANAGER	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TRIM FILE REF	2020/159923
ATTACHMENTS	NIL

SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To seek Council's approval for the proposed Business Support Plan and Community Care Package in response to the impacts of the emerging COVID-19 outbreak.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council continues to work on plans to mitigate adverse impacts of the emerging COVID-19 outbreak, ensuring continuation of critical business and the health and safety of its customers, employees and the Northern Beaches community. The safety of the community, customers, businesses and staff is our main priority.

In response to the impacts of the COVID-19 virus on local small businesses and the most vulnerable in our community, Council has developed a Business Support Plan and Community Care Package. These details are included in the report.

Council is also proposing to waive some small business fees and charges for the next six months for Environmental Health Inspection fees, Fire Safety fees and Outdoor Dining & Footpath Merchandising fees. In total this is an estimated reduction in income of \$1.2M. The budget impact will be addressed in the March Quarterly Review and in the development of the draft 2020/21 budget.

RECOMMENDATION OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

That Council:

1. Approve the Business Support Plan as detailed in the report.
2. Approve the waiving of the Environmental Health Inspection fees, Fire Safety fees and Outdoor Dining & Footpath Merchandising fees, equating to approximating \$1.2M as detailed in the report.
 - A. The budget adjustments for 2019/20 will be confirmed in the March Quarterly review.
 - B. The impact on the 2020/21 budget will be addressed in the development of the draft 2020/21 budget.
3. Approve the Community Care Package as detailed in the report.
4. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to make amendments to the Business Support Plan and Community Care Package as necessary and keep Councillors informed of such amendments.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

Council continues to work on plans to mitigate adverse impacts of the emerging COVID-19 outbreak, ensuring continuation of critical business and the health and safety of its customers, employees and the Northern Beaches community. The safety of the community, customers and staff is our main priority.

This report details how Council is responding to the potential impact of COVID-19 on the local economy and includes input from the local business chambers on the issues facing our business community and a Business Support Plan.

The Community Care Package aims to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the community at a time of increased anxiety, social isolation and increasing financial hardship. It will address the impacts of social distancing and bans on gatherings on all members of the Northern Beaches community and minimise the impacts to the most vulnerable members of our community. It is important that our whole community, especially the vulnerable, elderly and isolated individuals, feel supported at this time.

BUSINESS SUPPORT PLAN

Council recognises the pressure and uncertainty many businesses across the Northern Beaches are experiencing, following declaration by the World Health Organisation of COVID-19 Pandemic.

All levels of Government, Federal, State and Local are working to support local businesses to enable them to continue to provide vital services to our communities and help small business to stay in business.

At this stage, the priority for Council is to ensure our local business community feels supported by Council, is well informed and knows where and how to access advice, funding and practical resources.

Federal and NSW Government stimulus packages have been announced and there are a number of initiatives to support businesses – see page 4 for more details and links.

- Federal Governments Support Package website for more information on other support available <https://www.business.gov.au/risk-management/emergency-management/coronavirus-information-and-support-for-business>
- NSW Government Stimulus Package <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/economic-stimulus-package>

Specifically, Council's Business Support Plan includes:

1. **Waiving of Small Business Fees**

Council, through its fees and charges, can directly assist small businesses struggling with financial uncertainty. In particular the tourism and wider retail sector, will be vulnerable to reduced consumer spend.

We are proposing waiving a range of Council fees and charges to reduce the burden on these businesses. This includes the waiving of the following fees and charges for the following periods:

- a. Environmental Health Inspection fees (no annual fees or first inspection fees) for seven months from 1 February to 31 August 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$401,059.

- b. Fire Safety fees (no annual fees) for six months from 25 March to 30 September 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$147,169.
- c. Outdoor Dining & Footpath Merchandising fees (no fees) for six months from 1 April to 30 September 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$695,084.

2. Flexible and Pragmatic Enforcement and Compliance

Council have considered ways we can enable business operations to adapt to the changing consumer demand and adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to the enforcement and compliance action during the period while we are dealing with the public health risk of COVID-19.

We aim to limit our enforcement action to matters that are of an imminent public or environmental safety risk. This requires careful management to ensure it does not increase public risk and manages community impacts and expectations. A dedicated planner has been allocated to respond to business planning and compliance queries.

- a. Restaurants/ take-away businesses:
 - i. allowing restaurants which don't currently have development consent to undertake a take-away service
 - ii. relaxing timed parking requirements to enable increased take-away pickups in shopping areas.
- b. Supermarkets and food/ beverage premises:
 - i. not enforcing trading hours and delivery times for food/beverage premises and grocery stores.
- c. Allow increased outdoor dining lease areas where space allows to cater for social distancing.
 - i. Support will be provided by Council to work proactively with businesses to determine solutions and ensure safety requirements are met.
- d. Environmental Health Inspections:
 - i. waiving charges for Council's proactive routine inspection program that will continue fee-free. Our Environmental Health Team will also continue to investigate urgent and critical matters relating to public health and environmental impact but they will not incur fees or charges outside of enforcement action.

3. Rates and Annual Charges Hardship Policy

Apply the Rates and Annual Charges Hardship Policy to impacted ratepayers suffering financial hardship as a consequence of COVID-19.

Use the Rates and Charges Hardship Policy to support eligible small business ratepayers, or other eligible impacted ratepayers, to enter into payment arrangements and to waive associated interest in relation to the arrangement.

4. Actively co-ordinate business chambers and local networks

Regular communication with our local business chambers and local networks to understand the issues facing small businesses and identify ways in which Council can assist. The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) briefed the five Business Chamber presidents on the proposed Business Support Plan on 17 March 2020. We are establishing a weekly catch-up with the chamber presidents to continue to respond to the evolving situation.

5. Provide regular updates to our local businesses

With a growing database of over 10,000 local businesses, we will continue to regularly update on Government advice and support for business on COVID-19. This includes updating local businesses on health advice for their employees and customers, as well as opportunities to access financial support through the Federal and NSW State Government economic stimulus packages. We will also provide regular website updates for our business community and have created a dedicated 'Supporting Local Businesses' section on Council website.

6. Assist to build digital capability of businesses through social channels/webinars

With changes to the way we live and work that will flow onto the way we shop and spend, we will support local businesses to find new ways to connect with customers. Council's plan includes:

- delivering social media and marketing workshops online
- creating digital campaigns to promote shop local initiatives
- establishing a series of webinars to assist businesses adapt to changing conditions.

7. Build on relationships with State Government Agencies

Council will continue working with NSW State Government agencies to provide advice and support to our local businesses, including:

- Realise Business.
- Office of the Small Business Commissioner.
- Service NSW "Easy to do Business."

With local economic conditions changing rapidly, Council will continue to look at new ways we can connect with our business community and continue to provide support, ensuring we can scale-up our response, where necessary.

Visit our dedicated "Supporting Local Businesses" section on Council's website for more details.

See below for further details on Federal and Government support and advice.

With local economic conditions changing rapidly, Council will continue to look at ways to support local businesses and scale-up our responses, where necessary.

We will continue to meet regularly with the business chambers and send regular updates to keep the business community informed.

Federal and NSW State stimulus package for businesses

Federal Government

Last week the Federal Government Economic Stimulus Package focused on keeping Australians in jobs and helping small businesses stay in business. On the Northern Beaches, 98% of our 32,000 registered businesses are classified as small (employing less than 20 staff) and there are a range of stimulus and support available to our small business community.

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/economic-stimulus-package>

To deliver support for business investment and provide cashflow assistance for business, this includes:

- encouraging local small businesses to retain an apprentice or trainee, with 50% subsidy of their wage for nine months (January 2020 to September 2020)
- instant asset write off up to value of \$150,000 to encourage businesses to spend on new assets
- a 50% accelerated depreciation deduction for businesses (with a turnover less than \$500 million) to stimulate investment
- boost Cash Flow for Employers tax-free payments of up to \$25,000 to provide cash flow support to businesses with turnover of less than \$50 million.

NSW State Government

The NSW State Government announced on 17 March a NSW stimulus package to support businesses <https://preview.nsw.gov.au/news/23-billion-health-boost-and-economic-stimulus>:

- \$1.6 billion in tax relief for small businesses to help save jobs as the state braces for the dire economic impact of the virus.
- \$450 million to waive payroll tax for the next three months for businesses with payrolls of up to \$10 million.
- \$80 million to waive a range of fees and charges for small businesses including bars, cafes, restaurants and tradespeople.

Realise Business

Realise Business is the NSW Government Business Connect provider for Northern, Eastern and Southern Sydney. The Realise team of Advisors can provide general and specialist business advice in all areas of business. Their Advisory team consists of specialists in the areas of business disruption, retail, marketing, digital, finance and hospitality to name a few.

Realise also hold regular webinars and workshops, including an upcoming webinar on Small Business Interruption from the Coronavirus. <https://realise.business/event/coronavirus-has-created-unforeseen-disruption-to-business-here-are-some-things-you-can-control/>.

Community Care Package

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen numerous impacts across the Northern Beaches community, including:

- wide spread anxiety and worry, with the community looking to Council for leadership and advice
- panic hoarding of food and household items
- limited access to essential food, medication and hygiene items, particularly for older, people with disability and our most vulnerable community members
- social isolation, especially for people who may already have minimal social contact and limited use of online platforms
- loss or reduction in employment, and the impacts of this on mental health and homelessness
- increasing financial hardship.

The Community Care Package aims to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the community at a time of increased anxiety, social isolation and increasing financial hardship. It will also alleviate the impacts of social distancing and minimise the risk to our community by maintaining access to much needed community and social support services.

The key features of the package are; measures to maintain social connection for the community, modified delivery of essential Council services and coordination of local community service organisations and agencies providing essential services and support to the community.

1. Connecting community

With the cancellation/ postponement of community gatherings and events and the closure of community and cultural facilities, including the Manly Art Gallery & Museum, Glen Street Theatre as well as the temporary closure of Forestville, Glen Street and Dee Why Libraries, the community is at risk of becoming disconnected over the coming weeks. Council is well-placed to be a trusted and well-connected information source for the community. To address this social isolation, measures within the Community Care Package are:

- Continue to operate the Mona Vale, Warringah Mall and Manly libraries, to enable the community to access resources and facilities as well as have a respite from being at home. These libraries will be open from 9am to 11am specifically for seniors and vulnerable community members. The Library Service will introduce a number of initiatives, including:
 - Implementation of non-contact services in the Home Library Service so that the service can continue and be expanded if needed.
 - Library to You. People in isolation will be able to get a delivery of books, as an extension of the current Home Library Service. Customers who fall into this category will be able to submit an online form to request a book delivery, which will be live from week commencing 23 March.
 - Click and Collect Service. Customers will fill in an online form for up to 10 items and elect which branch to collect the items. Within three days, staff will contact customers via email and advise their order is ready to pick up. Customers will pick these items up from their library where measures will be in place to reduce person to person contact.
 - Promote library membership and the large amount of material on-line available through the website. Any community member can join the library on-line and have access to resources covering many interests and topics.
 - Review opportunities to increase the level of content available to customers on ePlatforms. This includes increasing the number of simultaneous titles available that customers can access with no wait times.
 - Make it easier to borrow items, with an extension of the loan period from three to six weeks, an increased cap on accumulated fines before borrowing ceases, and the continuation of the courier service between branches, ensuring customers have access to the full library collection.
 - Continually review the closure of the three closed libraries, Forestville, Glen Street and Dee Why in relation to demand and the improved status of the pandemic.
 - A plan to create more spaces with public computer access and free wifi where access has been restricted. Details of specific sites are to be released in the coming weeks.
- Continue to operate Council's Community Centres to provide space for multiple community groups and small businesses. These activities provide the community much needed social support and health, exercise and educational well-being. Some of the organisations operating from the centres also provide essential services to the community such as Pre-schools, Out of School Hours Care, Food Services and direct community support.

- Identify ways of staying in touch with a large number of volunteers within the Northern Beaches not able to volunteer in their area of interest during this period. This will include Manly Environment Centre, Manly Art Gallery & Museum, library services, bush care and events. Other actions include:
 - Implement a mechanism to capture volunteer opportunities still available, and direct willing and able members of our community to these volunteer roles in Council and community organisations that are continuing to provide essential services and support to the most vulnerable in the community.
 - Provide information and referral to coordinate volunteer and community groups offering assistance.
- Explore new ways of connecting with special interest communities, such as the arts and environmental communities, which could include on-line chat forums, on-line galleries, webinars and dissemination of information of interest to the specific group.
- Contact our database of community groups, religious organisations and cultural groups to assist them to develop clear action plans and identify how Council can assist their communities stay connected.
- Distribute information via Council's numerous networks and inter-agencies.
- Use social media, mailing lists, e-newsletters and information notices at Customer Service and Libraries to promote valid information and legitimate advice, such as information from the Department of Health and other state or federal agencies.
- Publish information on community service programs and support available to the community on our website, in areas such as mental health, meal services, essential services and financial support.
- Distribute general information via social media to assist in having a well-informed community and lessen community anxiety. Services will also be promoted to ensure the community is well connected with local agencies.
- Support groups that can no longer meet in person to implement online and video conferencing so they can still meet e.g. youth groups.
- Development of a "check on your neighbour" campaign to stay connected.

2. Essential Council community services

Council delivers some direct community services, with modifications required to our current delivery models and practices to ensure the safety of staff and the community. This includes:

- **Meals on Wheels.** This service targets the most vulnerable in our community, including older people, people with dementia and people with disability. The demand for this service has increased in the last week and it is anticipated this will continue if the pandemic continues for some time, as older people, who are the most vulnerable to the impacts of the virus, seek to self-isolate for long periods of time.

On advice and guidance from the State Meals on Wheels Association and Department of Health, additional social distancing and hygiene measures have been put in place for home deliveries. Wellbeing Checks are being implemented on each delivery and follow up will be provided by staff to ensure additional support requirements are identified, referred and actioned. In line with other Meals on Wheels services, Community Lunches have been cancelled; however, a Social Phone Check-In Service has been implemented to ensure social connection continues. If required, staff will be redeployed to ensure this essential service continues.

- **Adolescent & Family Counselling Service.** This service has moved to phone and online counselling sessions. It is essential it continue in some form as these are very vulnerable young people and families, and overall community stress is adding to that vulnerability.
- **Children's Services.** Continue to provide Council delivered long day care, pre-school, family day care and vacation care to our community to support workforce participation. There are a number of children with additional needs and from vulnerable families who will continue to be supported across Council's childcare services.

3. Coordination and support of community services

As the impact of the COVID-19 virus evolves, it is anticipated the demands on community service providers will increase, particularly in light of reduced employment, increasing financial hardship and social isolation.

Council will support local services and identify any service gaps that will best assist our community at this time. An internal working party has been established to coordinate outreach to not-for-profit and charity organisations that provide direct community services and support for the community. Staff have commenced calls to local agencies to discuss their response to the pandemic, how Council might assist with that response, identify any gaps in current service delivery, and how services might be coordinated to fill those gaps.

Service providers to be contacted in the first instance include providers that provide and/or support:

- meal and essential support services
- social housing and crisis accommodation
- services for victims of domestic violence
- homelessness services
- mental health support
- youth and family support services
- services for seniors and people with disabilities
- services for new migrants
- services for vulnerable community members
- employment and financial support services.

The working party will also obtain information to coordinate strategic responses to new emerging needs, such as grief and loss support as well as social connection programs.

The working group is identifying themes and developing actions that Council could take to assist these groups support their vulnerable clients. A key issue already identified is the need for various items to aid vulnerable community members, with investigation underway for Council to act as a promotion and collection point for those items, which will then be distributed to and by local services.

Other actions within the Community Care Package include:

- the use of online training and webinars for the Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper training and forums. It is vital that Council continues this program, and trains as many community members as possible
- continue promotion of the Community Grants program as this program assists community organisations to provide much needed services and programs. The face-to-face briefings have been cancelled, with direct phone calls to all known applicants to discuss grant guidelines and support the organisations in applying for this valuable financial support
- investigation into ways that Family Day Care could be used to respond to changes in demand should large Child Care Centres no longer be able to operate.

The Community Care Package is a live document, with amendments made when required. This will ensure Council continues to support and assist the community sector to provide essential services to the Northern Beaches community and mitigate the impact of social isolation.

CONSULTATION

Business Support Plan

Council has met with each of the five Business Chambers on the Northern Beaches to inform them of the proposed Business Support Plan and to collate ideas and actions for consideration in this report.

If approved, staff will inform businesses of the fee waivers and changes to planning and compliance through a range of communications including direct letters to businesses paying Outdoor Dining and Merchandise, Food Premises or Fire Safety Inspection fees. Place Coordinators will also keep businesses in our town centres and villages informed through flyers and posters as well as regular on-line newsletters.

Community Care Package

Council has liaised with key community service providers to develop the Community Care Package. To date, staff have been in contact with a large number of community organisations. These include Community Northern Beaches, Northern Beaches Community Connect, Community Care Northern Beaches, Easylink Transport, Manly Warringah Womens' Resource Centre, Northern Beaches Womens' Shelter, Mission Australia, Salvation Army, One Meal, The Link Food Care, Grace City Church Community Food Care and the Community Pantry.

Contact with community organisations will continue on a regular basis, with amendments made when required to continue to support and assist the community sector to provide essential services to the Northern Beaches community.

Community input to the plan will be sought through social media channels and the Your Say page on the website, in addition to input from Councils existing customers and the large number of community organisations that staff will be in contact with over the next few weeks.

TIMING

The Business Support Plan and the Community Care Package will be implemented from 25 March 2020.

The Outdoor dining fees will be waived from 1 April to 30 September 2020.

Environmental Health Inspection fees will be waived from 1 February to 31 August 2020.

Fire Safety fees will be waived from 25 March to 30 September 2020.

LINK TO STRATEGY

This report relates to the Community Strategic Plan Outcomes of:

- Community and Belonging - Goal 11: Our Community feels safe and supported.
- Vibrant Local Economy - Goal 13: Our businesses are well-connected and thrive in our environment that supports innovation and economic growth.
- Good Governance - Goal 20: Our Council efficiently and effectively responds to, and delivers on, the evolving needs of the community.
- Participation and Partnership - Goal 22: Our Council builds and maintains strong partnerships and advocates effectively on behalf of the community.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Council is proposing to waive business fees for the following:

- Environmental Health Inspection fees (no annual fees or first inspection fees) for seven months from 1 February to 31 August 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$401,059.
- Fire Safety fees (no annual fees) for six months from 25 March to 30 September 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$147,169.
- Outdoor Dining & Footpath Merchandising fees (no fees) for six months from 1 April – 30 September 2020 - reduction in revenue of \$695,084.

The community Care Package also provides financial relief in the reduction of library hold fees. In addition, the extension of borrowing times and fine amnesty will likely result in a reduction in overdue fine income. For the period 25 March – 20 September this would represent \$50,000.

The financial impacts of these changes include a reduction in fees and income over this period of approximately \$1.2M.

This will impact the current 2019/20 budget by \$650,303 and the 20/21 budget by \$593,009.

The 2019/20 budgeted income shortfall will be offset by operational savings and deferred Capital expenditure. The details will be reported to Council as part of the March Quarterly Review. The impacts on the draft 2020/21 budget will be addressed in the development of the draft budget.

The other actions and initiatives included in the report can be met within current operational budget forecasts.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As detailed above in the Community Care Package, there are significant social benefits that can be addressed by implementing this plan. It aims to minimise the risk to the whole community with attention to the most vulnerable members of our community.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

This Business Support Plan and Community Care Package have no specific environmental impact.

GOVERNANCE AND RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The provision of this financial assistance in the Business Support Package presents a potential financial risk however the scale of the risk is considered manageable by Council.

Any other identified risks will be managed according to Council's relevant risk management framework.