



# **GYMPIE REGIONAL COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

*of the*

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

**CHAIRMAN: Cr MW Curran (Mayor)**

**Held in the Boardroom**

**Town Hall**

**2 Caledonian Hill**

**Gympie Qld 4570**

**On Tuesday, 24 March 2020**

**At 9am**



Gympie Regional Council **SPECIAL**

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*Mayor MW Curran (Chairman)*

*Crs MA McDonald, GC Hartwig, MS Gear, DW Dodt, DH Stewart, HT Smerdon, WR Leitch and RA Fredman.*

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**The meeting commenced at 9.01am.**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Cr MW Curran (Chairman), Crs MA McDonald, GC Hartwig, MS Gear, DW Dodt, DH Stewart, HT Smerdon, WR Leitch and RA Fredman.

Also in attendance were Chief Executive Officer (Mr B Smith), Director Corporate and Community Services (Ms P Gordon), Director Planning and Development (Ms G Vereker), Director Infrastructure Services (Mr D Scordalides), Manager People and Organisational Development (Ms B Howard).

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

CR LEITCH GAVE THE FOLLOWING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

LET ME ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE MEET TODAY, I PAY MY RESPECTS TO THE ELDERS OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING.

**SECTION 1: APOLOGIES / LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

NIL

**SECTION 2: DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

The Mayor asked if any Councillor needed to disclose an interest in any agenda item.

No councillors disclosed an interest in any agenda item.

**SECTION 3: OFFICE OF THE CEO****3.1 Organisational Update COVID-19**

**PORTFOLIO:** Governance, Finance, ICT and Disaster Management

**DIRECTORATE:** Office of the CEO

**DOC ID:**

**LINKS TO CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN****STRATEGIC THEMES:**

1. Our Infrastructure – well planned, integrated and safe
2. Our Community – active, diverse, creative and engaged
3. Our Economy – dynamic, productive and resilient
4. Our Environment – sustainable, well-managed and accessible
5. Our Organisation – accountable, responsive, efficient and innovative

**1. BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION**

Councils executive team has been meeting for almost 3 weeks now to consider the ongoing impact of COVID-19. An important consideration has been Councils Business Continuity which outlines the critical functions council needs to maintain under a crisis situation. Significant effort by all staff has gone into scenario planning as well as managing an ever-changing situation particular with regard to services which have a public interface.

Key elements have included consistent messaging to staff and the community, managing expectations and concerns of staff in the community, and grappling with the ever changing circumstances around COVID-19.

**2. REPORT**

There are a number of key critical functions identified in the Business Continuity Plan and comments regarding these functions are as follows.

**Communications – internal and external (media/public)**

The Council Communications Unit is updating system processes, resource and backfill for delivery of external and internal communication for both remote and out of hour access to Council systems and data and staff rostering to ensure service levels are maintained.

This is to ensure updates on changes that affect people and services continues to be released to media outlets, community/residents and staff. To mitigate incorrect reporting, out of date information and support the various units across Council in consistent messaging.

Communications will also funnel all messaging to one source of correct and updated data – council website. Social media will be used to direct to the correct listing of up to date information and for messaging that is time sensitive.

Media requested will be managed to clarify any miscommunication that may arise.

Communications include: Media releases, social media messaging, website collateral, internal Fetch updates to staff, video/audio content, signage, customer contact scripting.

Communications staff are on call to act on time sensitive information and ensure messaging is clear, simple and factual and sets clear expectations for community regarding council services, programs and public facilities and buildings.

To maintain this level of service, staff have been allocated roles in two sections: Communications and digital delivery, with planned backup of unit staff to backfill when required.

Location of staff is also being considered to ensure levels of service are upheld.

#### **Payroll processing and file release**

People and Organisational Development looks after the Payroll function for Council. There are currently 3 full time and 1 part-time employees within the team. Given their close proximity the team are now appropriately spread adhering to social distancing requirements. Currently, there is work being undertaken with ICT to ensure prepared files are ready for support payroll processing in the event there is closure of offices. Should there be a forced closure, the team will be resourced as 2 full time staff members and undertake payroll processing remotely also if required. These initial approaches are to ensure that all staff continue to receive applicable pays.

#### **Staff safety and the availability of adequate staffing levels to maintain critical services.**

Staff safety and our duty of care is paramount during this uncertain time. Work being undertaken to date include;

- CEO communication with all staff
- COVID-19 Staff Guidelines (this includes providing a number of potential scenarios and the associated response/support for staff for, including how staff will be paid, for each potential scenario)
- Identification of critical/business essential roles/functions to Council, this assists in planning for continuity of service delivery to our customers and how that will be delivered
- Various support mechanisms in place for all staff, including EAP, Posters, Information

- Additional touch point cleaning in all offices, additional supply of hygiene materials and education regarding personal hygiene
- Variations to transporting of work crews, minimising crowded crew trucks
- Working with other Council's to ensure there is support and a relevant level of consistency on approaches to providing a safe work environment

### **Water treatment and reticulation**

Providing access to safe drinking water is assessed to be the highest priority function that the WBU provides.

The critical water treatment processes are:

- Disinfection – if this step fails, or is unavailable for any reason, then a boil water notice will have to be issued.
- Filtration – coagulation/flocculation and subsequent filtering removes 99% of all pathogens from the water.

The two essential chemicals to be sourced are chlorine (or sodium hypochlorite for smaller supplies) for disinfection; and aluminium sulphate for coagulation. Both are manufactured in Australia and our suppliers have confirmed that supply shortages are not expected.

### **Sewerage treatment**

The transport of sewage and its subsequent treatment is a critical element in ensuring that pathogens are separated from people. Thus the following processes are rated as either critical or very important:

- Stemming, containing and cleaning up sewer spills
- Operation of sewer pump stations
- Aeration of sewer ponds, to ensure the survival of the microbes responsible for breaking down sewage

The availability of chemicals has not been impacted by any shortages. This should remain the case.

#### *Availability of trained treatment plant operators*

If more than one or two operators was unavailable, for any reason, then the plants could not be operated *in their current manner*. It is possible that three or four operators may be unavailable at any given time in the next six months and operations have been prioritised over maintenance. Relatively unskilled tasks, like batching chemicals and cleaning launders, can be carried out by personnel with minimal experience.

Recently retired staff have been contacted and asked if they would be prepared to return to work for a few weeks or months, in the event of serious staff shortages. The response has been positive.

WBBROC councils are conducting a teleconference on Tuesday this week regarding the provision of mutual support in the event that any council suffers from a serious loss of qualified staff.

**Information and Communication Technology – phone, data networks and 2 way communications. Customer Service – specifically phone Customer Contact capabilities**

Critical business functions have been identified across Council by the respective business units. Technology and Business Systems(TBS) staff are currently working with staff who perform these functions to investigate how these services may be delivered remotely and securely.

Customer Contact is one of these business functions. A number of laptops have been provisioned for these staff to enable them to receive calls and capture information remotely.

Approximately 70 laptops are available to be allocated to other staff to ensure business continuity should staff be required to work from home.

TBS staff are also ascertaining who has home internet and technology that can be utilised.

Instructions to enable staff to access email from home computers and smart phones have been provided, ensuring communication with staff can continue.

Telecommunication carriers have advised of congestion on both voice and data networks. This could impact on staff working at home and the office. There has also been an increase in cyber security threats, with criminals capitalising on the COVID-19. We are expecting Council's data usage to increase rapidly, with an associated increase in costs.

Additionally, TBS critical functions including ensuring computer systems are backed up, available, and protected from cyber security incidents. Projects to ensure this will continue. Many suppliers assisting Council to do this are able to work remotely.

**Waste management services**

Kerbside Waste Collection

All efforts will be made to ensure continuity of the kerbside waste and recycling services. Discussions with Cleanaway have taken place regarding business continuity.

Frequency of collections may need to be reviewed if resourcing of the service becomes an issue.

Waste Management Facilities

The waste management facilities will remain operating as long as resources allow. Discussions with Endeavour Foundation have taken place regarding business continuity.



Self-haul waste disposal will need to be reviewed if resourcing of the Bonnick Road Waste Facility becomes an issue.

The operation of the actual landfill at Bonnick Road is the critical service that is required to remain in operation to receive collected domestic and commercial waste. Sufficient skilled plant operators are available within Infrastructure Services staff to adequately maintain this operation.

**Council works relating to public safety i.e. road maintenance**

Arrangements are being made to establish a multi-skilled on-call workforce of staff who can form teams to ensure various types of critical infrastructure is maintained as required.

Infrastructure Services have many suitable skilled and licenced staff resources to draw on given its large maintenance and construction workforce.

**Regulatory services that provide a public health and safety role i.e. animal management, building inspections.**

**Environmental Health and Regulatory Services**

- Burials – requests for funerals requiring burials will continue to be serviced in collaboration with Infrastructure Services
- Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) will operate an on-call service to respond to any urgent public health matters such as pollution spills. While considered unlikely to occur, if required/requested, Council's EHOs will assist Qld Health in any necessary public health matters (such as mosquito testing) on the basis that it enables state EHOs to focus on the government response to COVID-19
- Council's Dog and Cat Pound will continue to be managed by the RSPCA as normal, however the surrender/collection of animals will be subject to the recommended distancing guidelines
- The Ranger team will operate an on-call service for emergency responses to matters such as dog attacks.
- Water testing of Council's public potable water system would continue.

**3. BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget implications.

**4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no policy implications.

**5. CONSULTATION**

Executive Team

**6. CONCLUSION**

Over the past few weeks' staff have been faced with a number of key challenges across the organisation as a result of COVID-19.

Of particular importance to us is the protection and the welfare of our staff and volunteers as well as the community, all while continuing the provision of important services to the community.

As such Council has implemented the following:

- Closure of all 6 Libraries across the region. Council's Online Library will remain available 24/7 for users and offers access to thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and music and video streaming services.
- Closure of the Gympie Regional Gallery
- The Visitor Information Centre closed its doors and is now providing a 'Call and Collect' service through one of the centre's windows.
- Virtually all functions and events at the Pavilion and Civic Centre have been cancelled as has a range of other Council programs.

It is important to acknowledge all staff and the community for their cooperation and understanding in these uncertain times, the ongoing support for each other is something to be proud of.

**M18/03/20 Moved Cr DW Dodt**

**Seconded Cr WR Leitch**

**That the Report be noted.**

**Carried**

**FOR:** Cr MW Curran, Cr MA McDonald, Cr WR Leitch, Cr DW Dodt, Cr MS Gear, Cr GC Hartwig, Cr HT Smerdon, Cr DH Stewart and Cr RA Fredman

**AGAINST:** Nil

**3.2 COVID-19 Council Support for Business**

**PORTFOLIO:** Governance, Finance, ICT and Disaster Management

**DIRECTORATE:** Office of the CEO

**DOC ID:**

**LINKS TO CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN****STRATEGIC THEMES:**

1. Our Infrastructure – well planned, integrated and safe
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**1. BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION**

In accordance with the standing orders, the Mayor requested that a meeting be called to consider actions to support the local business community during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**2. REPORT**

The enormous impact of COVID-19 is already being felt within the local business community. The recent major actions by the Federal and State governments to support businesses and jobs demonstrates the seriousness of the current situation. The focus of these actions has been on ensuring businesses survive and employment is maintained where possible. The protection of the business will in turn lead to the protection of jobs. Where people do lose their jobs the Federal Government has put in place a range of supporting actions.

Council does not have the financial or technical ability to undertake widespread support to business to the magnitude which has been rolled out by the Federal Government however, there are some targeted actions council can undertake which can be of assistance to the local business community.

Currently the discount period concludes on 9 April 2020. By extending this period for three months for businesses until 9 July, cash flow assistance will be given to those businesses and means that this is a cost they do not have to worry about for some time. During this time those businesses will be able to determine to what degree they are eligible for the Federal or State Government assistance.

It is estimated that this will leave almost \$3.2M in the local economy for that period. This will play a role in assisting local businesses, enabling them time to determine what other assistance they can get from other levels of government and will aid in protecting jobs. It is vital that the assistance Council gives is targeted at those who need it noting that Council does need to continue to meet the ongoing cost of delivering essential services.

Council currently has over 1000 payment plans in place and as always discussions can and will continue to be held with those ratepayers who have difficulty in paying their rates. It is proposed that an extremely accommodating approach to the negotiation of payment plans be taken.

The situation is changing rapidly and it would be proposed that the new council as a matter of urgency review these measures in the coming weeks.

Additional measures designed to provide relief to businesses and the community through these tough times will include the relaxation or waiving of a number of Fees & Charges for the 2019/20 financial year. Council will consider further measures in the future as part of the 2020/21 budget process.

This relief may include the the waiver of:

- application fees, annual licences and inspections fees for food businesses such as cafes, mobile vendors and food stall;
- application fees, annual licences and inspection fees for personal appearance services such as body piercing and tattooing;
- building and building applications and inspections;
- applications fees in relation to temporary housing; and
- bacteriological sampling of portable or swimming pool water samples.
  
- Full application fees relating to cancelled events/activities/businesses not going ahead due to Covid-19;
- Application fees for any businesses requiring amendments to existing approvals to diversify their operations as a result of Covid-19 (relevant post the pandemic);
- Other Regulatory requirements imposed on business operations.

Further to this;

- No outstanding infrastructure charges will be pursued for six (6) months (this does not apply to the long-outstanding charges being recovered to address the concerns raised by Council's external auditors and Audit and Risk Management Committee);
- No pro-active development compliance in respect of small business for a period of six (6) months (nb: complaints received will need to be assessed on a case by case basis);

- Teleconference capabilities for pre-application meetings, at no charge
- No licensing fees applied to on-street dining (current Fees and Charges)
- Potential to waive annual food business renewal licensing fees (notices regarding renewals are proposed to be issued commencing August 2020)
- Potential to reduce/waive building application/inspection fees for small business as well as fees for annual backflow prevention device inspection

A coordinated response by Gympie Regional Council to the economic and human needs of businesses in the Gympie region in these unprecedented times will provide a measure of support for impacted businesses.

The establishment of a Gympie Regional Council COVID-19 Business Information and Referral contact service will provide callers with timely information on Council's COVID-19 package along with referrals to a range of appropriate assistance packages, including at State and Federal government level.

The Information and Referral Service can also connect local businesses with a range of other experts (e.g. financial counselling) and specialist local agencies that can provide assistance during this difficult time. There may be other initiatives requiring council support that businesses may wish to discuss. Council will work closely with the relevant State and Federal agencies in this regard.

In addition, the Service will provide information on measures designed to provide relief to businesses and the community to include the relaxation or waiving of a number of Fees & Charges for the 2019/20 financial year. This is covered elsewhere in the report.

Council will work with the business community to develop a Marketing & Communication Strategy encouraging people to buy local.

Options include but are not limited to:

1. Develop Buy local campaign: featuring a series of regional, subregional, area specific and focus on specific business types, mechanic, accommodation, hair and beauty, food, cafes, clothing, jewellers etc.  
Options to include radio, website, television commercials, newspaper.
2. Investigate the development of on line portals "Click and Collect" for retail areas Mary St, Centro, Southside, Mary Valley, Rainbow Beach, Tin Can Bay, Goomeri.

3. Engage interested businesses for inclusion in a 'Buy Local' coupon book. Council to provide a matching contribution to the local purchase.
4. Enter into sponsorships/partnerships with local media to partner in promoting how to access local businesses without face to face interactions
5. Establish Neighbour Support systems for connect neighbours in bulk buying / home deliveries.

Council will consider further measures in the future as part of the 2020/21 budget process.

### **3. BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

Council's financial position is able to support these actions.

### **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no policy implications.

### **5. CONSULTATION**

Executive Team

Business Community

### **6. CONCLUSION**

The measures proposed have specifically been targeted at the business sector which is the sector most at risk at the moment and needs the support. This has been demonstrated by the magnitude of support the Federal Government is giving to both businesses and people who lose their employment.

Councils actions in deferring rates for businesses for three months will leave a significant amount of money in the local economy, be one less thing businesses have to worry about in the next few weeks, and will enable businesses the opportunity to access Federal and State Government assistance.

The new council can review these measures after the election in March and has the option of extending or modify them.

There will be a significant proportion of the community financially unaffected and councils marketing and promotion initiatives will be aimed at ensuring those people continue to spend locally and support those businesses who are doing it tough.

Council has a role to play in community building and strengthening community resilience. It will be important that in developing 2020/21 budget there is a specific emphasis on projects and services which are necessary and which encourage local employment and support local businesses as well as encourage local employment.

**M19/03/20 Moved Cr DW Dodt****Seconded Cr DH Stewart****That:**

- 1. Council extend the discount period and due date for any unpaid rates for Category 3, Category 6 and Category 9 ratepayers to 9 July 2020. Interest will also be extended for a three-month period and will begin to accrue 60 days after this new due date.**
- 2. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Council's Fees and Charges 2019/2020 be amended to include an additional section as below: -**

**Waiver and Amendment to Fees and Charges in response to COVID-19**

**At the discretion of Council's Chief Executive Officer, Fees and Charges may be amended, reduced or waived where considered a necessary and appropriate response to the COVID-19 crisis.**

- 3. Council encourage ratepayers who are experiencing difficult meeting their rate obligations to enter into a short or long term payment arrangement;**
- 4. Council support the establishment of a COVID-19 Business Information and Referral Contact Service**
- 5. Council commence the implementation of a Marketing and Communications Strategy to encourage people to buy local.**
- 6. It be recommended to the new council that as a matter of urgency, the assistance to business be reviewed as soon as practicable after the election.**
- 7. It be recommended to the new council that the 2020/21 budget have an emphasis on projects which support local businesses and local employment.**


**Carried**

**FOR:** Cr MW Curran, Cr MA McDonald, Cr WR Leitch, Cr DW Dodt, Cr MS Gear, Cr GC Hartwig, Cr HT Smerdon, Cr DH Stewart and Cr RA Fredman

**AGAINST:** Nil

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.40 am

Confirmed this TWENTY-SEVENTH day of MAY 2020



Cr GC Hartwig  
CHAIRMAN