

AMENDED ITEM



Item No: 4.1
Title: Update on Actions - Response to COVID-19
Department: Governance

27 April 2020 Ordinary Council Meeting

Reference: F2020/01211 - D13903552
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Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview summary of key actions taken in response to COVID-19 since 16 March 2020. It is a general report and does not make specific recommendations as to actions. Any specific recommendations are presented in standalone reports to Council. The report pulls together information previously provided to Councillors through various sources and forums.

Recommendation

That Council receive the report on Update on Actions - Response to COVID-19.

Business Continuity Status

Council has a Business Continuity Plan. The plan sets out maximum allowable outages for services and outlines a governance model for the management of impacts upon business continuity. The plan provides for a Continuity Management team supported by a Tactical Team. The Continuity Management Team is all members of the Executive Leadership Team. The Tactical Team has representatives from People and Culture, Facilities and Asset Management, Community and Customer Relations, Procurement, Information Management and Technology, Finance and Governance.

The Business Continuity Plan was activated formally at 9.15am on Monday, 16 March 2020. The CMT then met each day and reviewed actions against a Pandemic Plan. The Pandemic Plan document had stages and as circumstances changed the status level escalated.

On 22 March 2020, the status level against the Pandemic Plan was determined by the CMT as extreme. This level was agreed to be when there was a high number of confirmed cases in the local government area. The decision to activate this level was also driven by Federal and State Government decisions.

Services

Essential Services have been identified and are being maintained. The Business Continuity Plan sets out the resources and skills required to maintain these essential services (and the relevant support services) in the event that stricter measures were introduced. Council has identified 962 services (internal and external) and of that over half continue to be provided without any interruption. Other services are being provided with a partial interruption. 134 services have been identified as interrupted.

The following services have been interrupted to varying degrees:

- Provision of lifeguard services
- Leisure facilities
- Seniors facilities
- Art Gallery
- Libraries
- Theatres
- Public events
- Central Coast Stadium
- Holiday Parks

Customer and Community

Council continues to provide a significant amount of services to the community. For example, the customer call centre has remained operational with staff working remotely. Performance has been high with regard to call response times despite the staff working remotely.

On Friday, 27 March 2020 a number of fees and charges were identified for waiving or for refund. These included fees levied on those businesses that were required to cease operation due to government restrictions.

It is also noted that at its meeting held Monday 23 March 2020 Council resolved to stall debt recovery actions.

Council has established an Economic Task Force to respond to local business impacts. Council's Advisory Committee meetings were stalled for a period but have resumed and are now being conducted remotely.

Workforce

Council will be signing up to the Splinter Award negotiated between Local Government NSW and the relevant Unions. This is an opt-in Award that sits alongside the current award. This allows Council to access options such as a Job Retention Allowance to maintain employment for permanent staff whose usual jobs have been impacted by closures or work stopping due to Council responding to restrictions around Coronavirus.

However, the aim for staff is to provide suitable duties wherever possible. Ongoing discussions are occurring with staff in those areas where it is expected to have a need to redeploy, to ensure that their skills and capabilities are understood to allow for alignment with suitable work elsewhere in the business.

Those Council staff in roles where it is possible to work remotely are currently doing so. Council's Information Management and Technology systems continue to perform very well and have capacity for further users to work remotely. Approximately 49% of the workforce is working remotely.

Arrangements are in place for those staff who travel together in vehicles as part of their work to cease to do so to provide for social distancing. Council has redistributed vehicles to provide for this and in some instances hired vehicles. In addition, some Council vehicles have been equipped with water to allow staff to wash their hands when on site.

Financial impact

Financial modelling is being undertaken to understand the short, medium and long terms impacts upon Council's financial position. This includes both long term impacts and shorter term cash flow impacts. It is noted that there is a report on this Business Paper regarding Council's borrowings.

Work will be undertaken to understand Council's cash flow and a target for savings. This will be reviewed regularly as circumstances change and affect cashflow.

Council has made representations to the Minister for Local Government regarding specific actions to assist Councils with regard to the financial burden. It is also noted that there is a Mayoral Minute on this Business Paper which includes some specific actions.

A key action at this time is to ensure that financial impacts are being recorded and noted. It will be imperative that Council is able to report on the impacts of COVID-19 on operations from a financial perspective. This information is being collected on an ongoing basis.

On 23 March 2020, Council adopted the 2020/21 Operational Plan on the provision that impacts of COVID 19 are yet to be fully quantified. It has been determined to extend the exhibition period by an additional week to allow consultation on impacts upon the budget. In addition, Councils have been given an additional month to complete the Operational Planning process and for it to be adopted by Council. This is being assessed to understand the benefits of deferment against the impacts of proceeding as planned.

Supplies

The Continuity Management Team receives daily reports of stock and shortages. At first, there were challenges with obtaining some Personal Protective Equipment and being confident in future supplies. There were also challenges obtaining some key stock such as anti-bacterial handwash.

Not only was there high demand for these items but supplies were being directed to essential services with health as a priority.

In the past week, this situation has improved vastly and Council's stock levels are much improved.

Contracts

All contracts are being reviewed as to their priority and sustainability. At a special focussed meeting held 15 April 2020, the CMT determined that current contracts would continue at this time. There is no intention to break any current contracts.

Upcoming tenders will be reviewed to understand the potential impact on cashflow and various other factors such as the capacity to stimulate the local economy, whether it prioritises work for Council staff, if there is associated grant funding, whether it is an essential service and if the work can be slowed rather than stopped. The decision as to whether to proceed to tender will be made in light of Council's cash flow and financial situation.

Facilities and Events

Child Care Centres remain open although attendance is reduced. Where care has been suspended the place remains secure for the child. Occasional care continues to be offered and this has been appreciated by customers.

Beaches remain open for exercise purposes. Council has been undertaking communications reminding people to recreate, not congregate. This includes signage and regular announcements from the lifeguards. Council continues to work and consult with NSW Police regarding communication and enforcement.

Council's waste facilities were closed to the public for a period but have since re-opened. Steps have been taken to ensure that social distancing requirements at these facilities can be met.

Council events through to at least 30 June 2020 have been either cancelled or postponed as of 17 March. Staff events were cancelled as of 17 March.

Interagency Actions

NSW Health is the lead agency. Council receives regular updates from NSW Health and the CMT has met with representatives from NSW Health.

Of key concern has been the risk when welfare services and facilities generally run by volunteers are no longer functioning and the impact on those at high risk in our community. It was noted that NSW Health is holding a weekly interagency meeting to which Council is invited.

4.1 Update on Actions - Response to COVID-19 (contd)

Council is receiving week day updates from the State Emergency Operations Centre through to our Local Emergency Management Officer.

Council is working closely with the NSW Police and key staff are in regular contact to understand issues and opportunities.

Council is providing information to the Office of Local Government regarding emerging issues and concerns.

Governance

This month the Independent Commission Against Corruption released *Managing corrupt conduct during the COVID-19 outbreak*. At its meeting held 9 April 2020 the CMT considered the report. From that report a number of actions were identified and are being undertaken. Weekly updates are being provided to Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee members.

Future focus

The current environment has presented a number of challenges but a number of opportunities have also emerged. Opportunities are being logged and captured.

A project has been identified to capture key performance indicators regarding the impact of COVID-19. This will allow Council to monitor indicators to understand when impacts are changing. For example, monitoring public transport usage to understand when the levels dip and when they start to rise again.

A further project has been identified to set out a structured plan to recommence full service provision. This will include opportunities for improvement that have been identified.

Attachments

Nil.