



Ordinary Meeting of Council

MAYORAL MINUTE

25 March 2020

Commencing at 5.30pm

Bungendore Council Chambers

On-site Inspections - Nil

7 MAYORAL MINUTE

7.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services3

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS –

(Copies available from General Manager's Office on request)

Open Attachments

- Item 1.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services
- Attachment 1 NSW Government Stimulus (Under Separate Cover)*
 - Attachment 2 Commonwealth Financial Assistance for Business (Under Separate Cover)*
 - Attachment 3 Non-Essential Services FAQ (Under Separate Cover)*
 - Attachment 4 Emergency Delegations (Under Separate Cover)*
 - Attachment 5 NSW - Emergency Measures Bill (Under Separate Cover)*

Closed Attachments

Nil

7.1 **Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services
(Author: Overall/Overall)**

File Reference: COVID-19

Summary

Since the reports for this Council meeting were prepared, the Commonwealth and NSW Governments have made further announcements and directions in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. **Note the Mayoral Minute on Coronavirus.**
2. **Endorse the closure of facilities, modified services and changes to public engagement as recommended in the report.**
3. **Temporarily modify the Code of Meeting Practice as outlined in the report, for endorsement at next Planning and Strategy meeting.**
4. **Implement interactive web and online video engagement tools.**
5. **Note authority delegated to the Mayor and CEO in accord with s226(d) and s377(1) of the *Local Government Act 1993* to exercise executive and emergency functions between meetings, including the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council.**
6. **Receive a further report on potential rebates and refunds for lessees of council properties effected by Government orders related to COVID-19, and hirers of facilities managed by Council or s355 Committees.**

Background

On 22 March, the Prime Minister and NSW Premier announced from 23 March 2020 the following non-essential activities and businesses were temporarily shut down across NSW:

- Pubs, registered clubs
- Gyms, indoor sporting venues
- Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, and night clubs
- Restaurants and cafes will be restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery
- Religious gatherings, places of worship (excluding small weddings and funerals that comply with the one person per four square metres rule, which can proceed).

That list is in addition to previous advice regarding public gatherings of more than 500 outside, and 100 inside – later shrinking to 1 person per 4m². As a consequence, Council's events and performance schedules were cancelled or postponed.

7.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services (Author: Overall/Overall) (Continued)

Based on NSW Health advice, schools will remain open. Parents are encouraged to keep their children at home. NSW is moving towards online learning, regardless of whether children are learning from home or in class.

These initiatives were to reinforce social distancing amongst the community, and to limit the spread of the virus – particularly amongst the vulnerable and elderly.

Restrictions to hours of delivery for supermarkets in cities and towns have been lifted across the state, to restock shelves and mitigate the impacts of panic buying.

On 20 March, the CRJO councils published a consistent set of policies to manage staff wellbeing and absences, travel, training, redeployment, and offer flexible working arrangements such as working from home to contain the spread amongst the workforce, and retain personnel required to undertake essential services.

On 23 March, the NSW Health Minister, Chief Health Officer and the Office of Local Government hosted a webinar for mayors and general managers on the pandemic, confirming the Government approach and requesting local government assistance in the effort to manage the pandemic.

NSW Essential Services legislation lists water, wastewater and waste as essential services, however OLG has signalled further information to come on essential services and conduct of council governance and meetings.

In activating the business continuity plan last week, senior staff are working through various essential service sub-plans, which in turn, may lead to reduced or cancelled services, and alternate modes of delivery of non-essential services. The senior staff, who comprise the Crisis Management Team, are looking at those alternate modes as a potential ongoing means of delivery of some services.

In line with the advice of Government and agencies, it is proposed the following facilities be closed and services modified accordingly. It is understood the CRJO councils are following a similar approach:

Recommended closure of QPRC operated facilities and services, to minimise contact with and exposure of the vulnerable and elderly in our community:

- libraries
- performance theatre
- museums
- visitor centres
- community centres
- youth centres
- galleries
- aquatic facilities and pools

For community halls or facilities managed under delegation by s355 Committees or clubs, it is proposed they close and Committees be requested to cancel all bookings for six months, opening the facilities only for the conduct of meetings for essential services, and applying the social distancing guidance. The Kangaroos Club and Tigers Clubs are separate privately managed facilities and closed by the Government. The Riverside, Freebody, Seiffert, High

7.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services (Author: Overall/Overall) (Continued)

and Whites clubrooms, Showground meeting rooms are all Council managed and are closed as indoor venues.

Open and green spaces such as parks and sports reserves will remain open for the community to utilise for their physical and mental wellbeing.

Public conveniences remain open and subject to increased cleaning schedules, subject to effects of any vandalism.

Recommended closure of QPRC facilities and services, to minimise contact of staff:

In addition, to minimise public contact in 'high touch' areas, closure of customer contact/service desks and cash transaction points will be progressed at:

- Council offices (QBN, BGD, BWD)
- Depots (QBN)
- Animal pound
- Recycling sale centres

Modified Service Delivery

In response to closures, some services will be modified, such as:

- online (zoom) meetings and development panels
- expanding online, home and mobile library services
- live chat function via Council's website along with regular telephone customer service
- online youth services and food hub
- online development applications and meetings; and bushfire recovery meetings and outreach.
- duty planning service from QBN office only
- applications and payments will be required to be lodged online

The NSW Government is progressing the e-portal for lodgement of all DAs in NSW to commence 1 July. The library branches have closed following State Library guidance.

Council Meetings and Elections

OLG have advised changes to the Meeting Regulations are progressing, to enable online/remote attendance by councillors to ensure quorums for decision making. Similarly the SEO is working through options for potential online or postal voting for the September 2020 elections.

In the meantime, Councils are encouraged to minimise potential exposure during council and public meetings. To that end, the chambers have been modified to provide suitable distances between councillors and members of the public gallery. In addition to live streaming of meetings, a monitor may be set up in a room adjacent to the meeting to enable the public to maintain social distances in those spaces.

However it is proposed Council choose to temporarily amend its Code of Meeting Practice to restrict the public from physical attendance at meetings and public forums, instead enabling

7.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services (Author: Overall/Overall) (Continued)

lodgement of presentations and submissions by midday of the meeting, for distribution by staff to councillors at the meeting or display on screen.

Emergency Delegations

Council has also received the attached advice on mechanisms to continue operations and decision making in such a crisis.

It is proposed Council make appropriate delegations to the Mayor and CEO to enable executive and emergency decisions, in the absence of, or between, a council meeting. Such a delegation would be complimentary to a mayor's role under s226(d) of the LG Act 'to exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council between meetings of the council'.

Legislative Changes

The NSW Government will introduce the *COVID-19 Legislation Amendment (Emergency Measures) Bill* (summary attached) which aims to accelerate to health and related planning matters, as well as considers modifications to the LG Act to enable electronic meetings and changes to the elections.

Recommended Changes to Public Engagement

Council has a number of strategies and proposals subject to public engagement in coming months including the LEP, rates harmonisation and next operational plan. It is proposed:

- 'Town hall' style public meetings not be held
- expand social media engagement, including potential Facebook video online and live streaming
- introduce interactive web and online video tools

Financial

Both Governments have published a mix of economic stimulus and financial assistance to business and vulnerable members of the community (see attached). It is not proposed NSW councils provide additional stimulus or assistance at cost to local budgets, however Council will record expenses associated with the Coronavirus response. There may be a risk of rate defaults should the pandemic extend well into next financial year, with subsequent business and job losses. A further report is proposed to consider relief to lessees of council property used for cafes and indoor sports; and pre-paid hirers of community halls.

It is suggested the web and video software (~\$25k) be funded through the bushfire recovery assistance grant, to enable continued interaction with residents and business.

Conclusion






The coronavirus pandemic is fast moving and fluid. In QPRC and the region, the economic and social impacts are in addition to those felt with the recent bushfires and is impacting the recovery process. While a vaccine is unavailable for coronavirus, its impacts are broader and deeper than the seasonal influenza, notwithstanding both will feature this winter.

The Governments have implored councils, NGOs and the community to work together to minimise the spread of the virus, aiming to flatten the curve within the capacity of the health system.

**7.1 Coronavirus - Closure of Non Essential Facilities and Restriction of Services
(Author: Overall/Overall) (Continued)**

The recommended closure of facilities and changes to meetings and services should assist.

Attachments

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