

## 1. CORONAVIRUS – HIGH LEVEL PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE COUNCIL’S RESPONSE

Submitting Councillor: The Mayor, Cr James and Cr Zographos

### **MOTION**

- 1. That the principles outlined in this report be adopted as high level principles which are to guide Council’s response to the coronavirus.*
- 2. That Council’s Hardship Policy be varied in accordance with principles 4 and 5.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

These are unprecedented times and Council recognises that:

1. every member of our community will be impacted;
2. every business in the municipality will be impacted; and
3. Council’s usual operations and staff will be impacted.

Given these wide-ranging, evolving and unpredictable impacts, Council recognises that it cannot deal with all aspects of Council’s response to this crisis at this early point. Further, Council also recognises that in these extraordinary circumstances it is desirable for the Chief Executive Officer to be fully empowered to respond quickly and comprehensively as needs and requirements change.

### **DISCUSSION**

Given the uncertainty in the months ahead, it is appropriate for Council to adopt a set of principles which establishes Council’s commitment to support our community, local business and our staff.

Following consultation with all councillors and Council’s Executive Leadership Team, this report proposes a number of high-level principles be adopted to guide Council’s initial response to this unfolding crisis.

Council expects that further principles and decisions will follow in the future, but in the meantime, the principles set out in this report will provide clear guidance to the Chief Executive Officer, Council staff, the community and local business as to Council’s intended approach to managing and responding to some of the impacts arising from coronavirus.

We expect that many ratepayers will need support to deal with Council’s regular annual charges such as rates and other fees such as pet registrations. By making some changes to Council’s existing Hardship Policy, Council will provide the ability to defer these expenses to any ratepayer (individual or business) who is significantly financially impacted by Australia’s response to the coronavirus with no interest accruable until at least 30 June 2021.

Further, as a responsible employer we also want to provide some certainty to Council’s employees that their job and income is secure. This crisis will pass and we want them to know

we will stand by them in the same way that they have stood by Council and our community in the past.

Councillors also want to collectively resolve that we will, as individual councillors, each play our part in assisting with maintaining a clear, uniform and united approach to all messaging associated with Council's response to the coronavirus so that all public commentary is consistent with official Council information to avoid any confusion amongst our community.

## **PRINCIPLES**

### **In general**

1. Council will prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of our residents, service recipients and staff above everything else. Subsequent to this, but still important and of high priority, is to continue to deliver essential and/or important services wherever possible and for as long as possible.
2. The CEO has unfettered authority to make and implement any operational decisions in relation to Council services or operations in response to the coronavirus providing this is consistent with, and in line with, official health advice from the Australian and Victorian governments.
3. If the CEO feels it is necessary to depart from official state or federal government advice, then she should, prior to making or implementing such a change, consult with Councillors if possible and consider any views that are raised.

### **Hardship**

4. Council recognises that the effects of social distancing and Australia's response to the coronavirus will, and already has, led to significant impacts on the entire community including all local businesses and all households. Some of these impacts include people losing their job, people being employed for reduced hours, businesses shutting down and businesses reducing their operations. Council recognises that the financial impacts likely to arise from such impacts will be significant and severe. Council explicitly recognises that such impacts on individual and business ratepayers will likely in many cases meet the definition of Council's Hardship Policy and these ratepayers will be eligible to apply to defer the payment of rates and charges.
5. In response to the expected consequences of Australia's response to the coronavirus, Council will make the following changes to its Hardship Policy until further notice:
  - a. the interest rate to be charged on any approved rate and/or charges deferrals will be reduced to 0% until June 30<sup>th</sup> 2021
  - b. Up until June 30, 2021, Council will not require that the property which is the subject of a deferral application be the ratepayer's principal place of residence for an application pursuant to clause 4.1.1.1 of the policy.
6. Council will write to all ratepayers in the municipality drawing their attention to the Hardship Policy and encouraging them to apply for relief under it if they are significantly financially impacted by Australia's response to the coronavirus. This letter should also be used to update the community on Council's response to the coronavirus generally, outline measures Council has taken thus far and to direct

ratepayers to a specific link on our website where they can obtain the latest up-to-date information

7. All footpath trading fees paid by businesses which offer outdoor dining on Council land are suspended as of 1 March 2020. Where payments have already been made for any footpath trading after 1 March 2020, Council will provide refunds.

### **Council Staff**

8. Council is committed to providing ongoing employment and wages to all permanent staff.
9. Council is also committed to providing ongoing employment and wages to any casual staff member who has been employed by Council on a regular and systemic basis for at least six months and where, absent any coronavirus impacts, it would reasonably be anticipated that they would continue to be employed on a regular and systematic basis by Council.
10. Any staff member who is impacted by coronavirus outside of their control, for example self-isolation requirements, will be supported with special leave arrangements providing appropriate medical evidence or other relevant supporting documentation can be provided.
11. Council will create work from home arrangements for staff where practicable and within guidelines set by the Executive Leadership Team.
12. Compensation will be made available for any reasonable additional work related expenses incurred as a result of working remotely such as home internet and mobile expenses.

### **Approach from Councillors**

13. Consistent with best practice governance in emergency situations, councillors will refrain from publicly expressing disunity or demonstrating a fragmented approach to matters in relation to Council's management of the coronavirus.
14. The Mayor and the CEO (or specific officers delegated by the CEO) are the sole spokespeople for Council in relation to all public commentary and communication in relation to the coronavirus.
15. All councillors are encouraged to refrain from providing public commentary on coronavirus. For clarification, this does not preclude a Councillor from responding to resident queries in order to facilitate dissemination of official Council information.