

Good Morning Members,

As we head into a very unusual Easter and school holidays, a quick update from your Committee.

Firstly, how are you going? Please drop us an email to chamber@gunnedah.org.au (just hit reply) and let us know how you are - and we would love your ideas for the Chamber as to what information or support members may need or want. We are asking for your input - let us know the ups and downs of what is happening for you. The Committee is keen to hear from you - we are in regular contact with Local, State and Federal Government and departments who can help if we can clearly articulate what we need. Please get in touch.

If you haven't already registered on Localised please have a look - <https://gunnedahshire.localised.com.au> - a great resource to keep business in our region.

To keep you in the loop - the Exec has been meeting regularly with Council's Business Development team and last week the Committee held our first Zoom meeting! From that meeting we sent our letter to Council shown below and have received the GM's reply. Let us know your feedback please!



Mr Eric Groth
The General Manager
Gunnedah Shire Council
Elgin Street
GUNNEDAH NSW 2380

3 April 2020

Dear Mr Groth

COVID19 crisis – Council assisting local businesses

The Gunnedah & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc. calls on Council to support our local business during the present crisis without delay.

After a protracted drought, our businesses now face a further test having immediate and profound impact on our economy. Many businesses have been forced to close by government directive. Employees have been stood down. Business planning and investment is on hold. Recession of the economy is a real threat. The assistance measures announced by the Commonwealth and State governments will help if the criteria can be satisfied by all our businesses. Chamber has been asked for ideas by Council to assist our businesses. We note that, as the situation develops, ideas will continue to evolve so this our first letter.

Local procurement

We think Council can act immediately by procuring goods and services locally. Chamber notes that Council's current procurement and tendering policy, adopted 21 February 2018, allows preference for local suppliers if value for money. In these times, choosing local suppliers even if not value for money would ensure their survival. Our businesses may not have the economies of scale of big business, but they will contribute to a vibrant local economy going forward if they are supported.

We appreciate Council will have existing contracts in place. However, it may be possible due to the emergency to vary suppliers or terms with non-local suppliers without penalty. Additionally, we think Council has a level of discretionary spend that could be put through our local businesses right now across food catering, stationery, manufacturing and building and professional services. Undertaking this as soon as possible will be a positive message of support by Council to the community.

Longer term, we ask Council to focus on "shop local" across the full spectrum of expenses. Presenting workshops to local businesses so they comply with Council's tendering processes and "value for money" objective could be undertaken once our economy recovers.

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GUNNEDAH & DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INC
ABN 14 373 864 881
PO Box 176 GUNNEDAH NSW 2380
www.gunnedah.org.au or via secretary@gunnedah.org.au



Payment of suppliers

Where Council is using local suppliers, we ask that their accounts be paid as soon as possible and latest by 30 days for cash flow purposes.

Rates relief

Chamber calls on Council to apply to the State Government to waive two quarters of rates for commercial ratepayers under a certain turnover threshold, say \$2million. If this is not possible, Council should address how to make a significant reduction in its fees and charges.

Projects

Chamber applauds Council's decision to dedicate \$1million to the Drought Resilience Program, using local suppliers for local projects to stimulate our economy after the drought. Chamber understands that projects have been approved, using local suppliers, and grantees are signing documentation so works can begin fairly soon.

This program could be extended, by applying to the State Government for increased funding so more projects can be approved and commenced using local suppliers.

Additionally, Council could review its works schedule to bring projects forward. Undertaking a continuous and sustainable schedule of projects using local suppliers would obviously help them stay viable.

Business training and development

Council has excellent measures in place to assist businesses get established in Gunnedah and grow their networks here. There have been business training and workshops organised in the past and business applications streamlined. The restrictions on social distancing make this difficult to carry on at present. Chamber wishes to flag the need to expand on this, once restrictions are lifted.

Namoi Valley Independent

Chamber would encourage Council to place advertisements and stories in our local newspaper. There is pressure on regional newspapers to survive in the digital age. Having a local newspaper is key to our community staying connected and having identity in tough times such as these.

Flu vaccines

The writer is informed that our pharmacies are processing about 50 patients a day for existing influenza vaccines. This may only increase as Winter approaches, and when a COVID19 vaccine becomes available. We appreciate discussion would be needed with NSW Health, but what if Council made the Town Hall available to our residents so that pharmacists and other health professionals could deliver these vaccines with ample area to maintain social distancing?

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Way forward

We thank Council for its focus on assisting our businesses get through this emergency. Our businesses are fundamental to a thriving and productive community and Council's supportive relationship with us has immeasurable value.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or any member of our Executive to discuss further. We stand ready to assist.

Yours sincerely

Juliana Elizabeth McArthur
President 0412 051 061

3/3 pages

Dear Mrs McArthur,

Thank you for taking the time to send through the letter from the Chamber and in committing to writing some ideas on what Council may be able to do to support local business.

Based on much of the feedback collected from yourself, the Chamber and other businesses the economic development team have pulled together a draft Community Resilience – COVID-19 Business Support Package that is intended to be submitted to Council for consideration, and ideally (with respect to without delay) adoption at it's April Ordinary meeting next Wednesday.

This Package will address many of the points raised, however I will briefly touch on each head of consideration raised in your letter. One point to note with the Package is that it will, like most initiatives responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, need to develop over time, however Council recognises the need to get what we can out there and on the ground to support business now, whilst continuing to work on other items which either require further consideration or which are better timed for a recovery phase.

Local Procurement

Council whole heartedly supports doing as much as we can in this space. As you would no doubt be aware, in the existing Community Resilience Program the focus has been keenly on those projects which will stimulate the local economy. Projects which have a majority or entire content of local spend have been prioritised over and above others; that is an additional consideration in addition to and above any local procurement policy requirements. The Package will continue to focus and expand on this.

Payment of suppliers

As you may or may not be aware, Council has already initiated more favourable payment terms for some suppliers and does have a weekly payment run in place. Further examination of what we can do in this space is again part of the Package.

Rates Relief

Council has called on the State and Federal Government to consider subsidising of rates, which has been met with a response which essentially details everything else they are doing. Council has, as of 24 March resolved to, for those ratepayers who enter into payment arrangements, freeze interest charges on overdue account as at that date, and accruing from that point as well as depart from its debt recovery policy (by not escalating to legal recovery means) for such ratepayers. Without state or federal subsidy, Council not otherwise levying and collecting rates would have a significant impact on its ability to delivery services and take a targeted approach to business support.

This draft package does include recommendations for waiving of fees and charges targeted at easing the burden on business. It also tries to balance support with the current federal initiative to place sections of the economy into hibernation; recognising that there may be merit in postponing some stimulus until a recovery phase so as not to be add odds with that approach, and thereby waste ratepayer funded initiatives.

Projects

The team in drafting the Package again has considered what further projects it may be able to deliver or bring forward, especially focusing on those with a potential for local delivery. There are current conversations with State and Federal Government about bolstering that capacity with further funding. Recognition of the existing Community Resilience Program, developed in response to drought, is appreciated and it is also noted that Council is delivering a capital works program well in excess of 4 times it's annual average for the preceding 10 years.

Business Training and Development

Thank you for your comments in this regard and I am pleased to advise that further initiatives are recommended as part of the draft Package to further support local business.

Namoi Valley Independent

Council does endeavour to support local media and where possible run content in the local paper.

Flu Vaccines

At the time of responding Council is working with a local medical practice to deliver flu vaccinations in the very short term utilising Council facilities for a “drive-thru” delivery method, which would maintain social distancing requirements.

Council looks forward to continue a positive working relationship, of critical importance to our whole community, with the Chamber, its membership and the broader business community and once again appreciates your approach to ensure that we are understanding the best ways in which the Chamber anticipates Council may be able to assist.

I look forward to Council’s consideration of the Package and our earliest communication with you of the detail arising from such.

Kind regards

Eric