



THE LORD MAYOR OF SYDNEY CLOVER MOORE

City of Sydney announces first stage of COVID-19 Business, Arts and Creative Support package

20 March, 2019

The City of Sydney today released a \$25 million package of measures to support businesses and reduce the financial impact of COVID-19.

“Over the past two months, the City has been working with NSW Health to ensure we respond urgently and effectively to the spread of COVID-19,” the Lord Mayor said.

“The health and wellbeing of our communities is paramount, but we are also very concerned about businesses experiencing a significant downturn in patrons, and people left without work.

“The pandemic adversely impacts businesses of every size within the City, which is why we are carefully considering a range of options to support our community.

“We will provide rent relief for our tenants who need it. We will refund venue and advertising fees for any organisation that made a booking with us, but has now cancelled their event. We have also committed to covering two weeks of staff and operational costs for all our aquatic centres for the next two weeks – this will help them continue to pay their staff during this period and maintain business continuity in the long term.

“We are waiving outdoor dining fees, and if restaurants, cafes and bars have space to put chairs and tables outside to maintain their service, we encourage them to do so. We will not charge them for use of the footpath, or fine them for not having a permit. We will continue to complete our necessary health and safety inspections, but we will not charge the regular fee.

“We have also directed our rangers to use discretion and only issue parking fines or other penalties if there is an imminent public or environmental health or safety risk.”

At its last meeting, the City of Sydney Council unanimously endorsed the Lord Mayor’s Minute to investigate and instigate appropriate support measures. Further meetings of Council will consider additional measures.

The following measures will be in place for an initial period of six months:

- The City will waive fees for Health and Building compliance activities (anticipated revenue loss of \$1.6M);
- The City, in conjunction with its tenants, will review rents in City premises for tenants that require support on a case-by-case basis (anticipated cost up to a value of \$4M);
- The City will waive its standard contractual terms and return booking and banner fees to people and organisations who have booked City of Sydney venues and are now unable to proceed with their bookings (anticipated costs up to a value of \$3M);
- Footway dining, market permit and filming fees will be waived on the grounds of hardship for an initial period of six months (anticipated revenue loss of \$1.5M); and
- Reduced revenue due to flexible parking infringements (anticipated revenue loss of \$10-15M).

The City will also work with major business partners and contractors, whether or not services continue to be provided in their current form, to support them as much as possible so they can continue to pay their staff during this period and maintain business continuity in the long term. The City has committed to covering two weeks of staff and operational costs for all its aquatic centres for a two week closure period.

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The financial support will add to the policy changes the City has already implemented, including:

- To facilitate social distancing, some businesses will need to expand their outdoor dining areas and increase or introduce take away food options, and the City will help facilitate this.
- The City will only take enforcement action for matters that present an imminent public, environmental, health or safety risk.
- Supermarkets and other stores will be able to operate their loading docks 24 hours a day to enable them to have essential goods delivered. The City has contacted all major supermarkets to advise them of this change.

The Lord Mayor said the City was working on a second stage of its support package, targeting those in the creative, arts and entertainment industries.

“The social distancing that is so crucial for public health is, sadly, hurting the livelihoods of many in our community. Those who work in our creative, arts and entertainment industries are facing months of cancelled events, lost income and uncertainty,” the Lord Mayor said.

“I also support the call from welfare and arts bodies for a ban on housing evictions in the coming months, to give some certainty to those who have lost their income due to coronavirus.

“We stand together with those who enrich our cultural lives and help us reflect on and understand the world we live in – especially during this crisis.

“The situation is changing daily. No one knows how long this crisis will last. This is the first of our financial support measures and we are now developing a small business quick response grants program, and will continue to work with the State and Federal Governments to ensure communities receive the financial relief that is needed.”

The Lord Mayor said the City would continue to monitor the situation and do everything in its operational control to maintain community health and safety.

“We will remain vigilant and continue to work with NSW health authorities to ensure the city and our staff are prepared for further spread of the coronavirus,” the Lord Mayor said.

“This week, we announced that we would be cancelling or postponing all non-essential events and in-person meetings, closing our gyms and aquatic centres and placing restricted hours on libraries and community centres. We did not come to the decision to cancel events or close facilities lightly, but we believe it’s best for the community that we do so.

“Staff from our Homelessness Unit have been out across the City over the past fortnight talking with people who are sleeping rough. They are sharing basic health information on laminated cards, and working with the Department of Communities and Justice who are trying to get people sleeping rough into temporary accommodation and housing.

“This is an unprecedented health emergency. We stand ready to support our residents, businesses, cultural and vulnerable communities through this challenging time.”

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