

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 14 APRIL 2020, IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, ALICE SPRINGS

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic this meeting was held via Zoom

PRESENT: His Worship the Mayor D. Ryan
Councillor G. Auricht (Chair)
Councillor J. Cocking
Councillor E. Melky
Councillor M. Paterson
Councillor J. Price
Councillor C. Satour

OFFICERS: Mr R. Jennings - Chief Executive Officer
Ms S. Taylor - Director Corporate Services
Mr T. Allen –Director Technical Services
Mr S. Duke - Acting Director Community Development
Mrs T. Ocones - Executive Assistant (Minutes)

The meeting was declared open at 5.30pm

1. APOLOGIES

Nil

2. RESPONSE TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Nil

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Nil

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 Minutes of Meeting held 16 March 2020

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council

That the minutes of the Open Section of the Corporate Services Committee meeting held on 16 March 2020 be taken as read and confirmed as a true and correct record of the proceedings of those meetings.

(11 cs)
CARRIED

4.2 Business Arising

4.2.1 Councillor Banks – Agenda Item 5.2, Budget line for Preparedness in regard to Potential Compulsory Acquisition of Council Assets

Councillor Banks requested an update from the Chief Executive Officer regarding the compulsory acquisition of the Anzac Oval precinct.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that work had already started on the compulsory acquisition of Council assets, however the Council Solicitor's work priorities were taken over by COVID-19. Council officers are now back on to it and will provide information to Elected Members in due course.

4.2.2 Councillor Banks – Agenda Item 9.2, Directorate Update

Councillor Banks asked for an update on various budget items enquired by Elected Members which were taken on notice by the Director Technical Services.

The Director Technical Services advised that the responses have been provided to appropriate Elected Members but will have the responses available to Councillor Banks.

ACTION

Director of Technical Services to send responses from questions taken on notice to Councillor Banks.

5. IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

5.1 Identification of items for discussion

The following items were identified for discussion:

9.1, 9.2, 9.3

5.2 Identification of items to be raised in General Business by Elected Members and Officers

- Deputy Mayor Paterson – Voucher Scheme
- Councillor Melky – COVID-19 Community Care and Adapt Recovery Plan
- Councillor Melky – Confidential Information Leak

6. DEPUTATIONS

Nil

7. PETITIONS

Nil

8. NOTICES OF MOTION

Nil

9. REPORTS OF OFFICERS

9.1 Corporate Services Directorate Update
Report No. 77/20 cs (DCS)

This report provides an update of current Corporate Services projects, programs and events.

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council

That the April 2020 Corporate Services Directorate Update be received and noted.

(12 cs)

The following questions were raised by Elected Members for clarification:

- Councillor Melky – Attachment A, Financial Report: the rates YTD Variance of \$45,952 on Attachment 1, Budgeted Statement of Financial Performance, does not match with the Rates and Charges Analysis figure of \$5,011,152 presented on Attachment 5.

ACTION

The Director Corporate Services took the questions on notice.

- Councillor Melky will email further questions directly to Director Corporate Services in regard to various amounts of unspent and overspent funds through the budget lines from page 62 of the financial report. He will also include the media in his correspondence. Councillor Auricht added he also emailed the same queries to the Director earlier on.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that Council's method of accounting is the accrual method resulting in some under spend and overspend funds. She will be working through the budget in coming days and would be able to identify what funds are committed.

- Councillor Cocking – Attachment C, Governance Unit report: referred to the Risk Compliance Report on Street Lighting Liability Response and enquired if there was a written agreement between the Alice Springs Town Council and Power and Water that Council carries no liability in regards to maintenance of street.

The Director Technical Services responded that this was a verbal statement made by the previous Power and Water CEO Michael Thomson at a meeting between himself, Council Solicitor and Director Technical Services. Council sent a letter back to Power and Water CEO clarifying his comment, but he was no longer employed at Power and Water at that time.

Mayor Ryan wanted to bring to the attention of the Elected Members that this time last year 82.06% of rates and charges and had been paid, at the same time this year it is slightly higher at 82.21%.

9.2 Review of constitutional arrangements for Council representation
Report No. 48/20 cs (GM)

Further to the report provided to Council at the September 2019 meeting, and as required under the Local Government Act, this report provides information on the Electoral Representation Review and a recommendation on whether to propose changes to the Electoral Representation for Alice Springs.

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council:

- A. That Council approve the ‘Review of constitutional arrangements for Council representation’ report which recommends no changes to the electoral representation for the municipality of Alice Springs.**
- B. That the Northern Territory Electoral Commission invest in education and engagement of community in partnership with Council to ensure that the value of Council and the value of participating in Council election is understood by the broader community of Alice Springs.**

(13 cs)

Councillor Melky put forward for discussion better Council representation including Indigenous people in Alice Springs. Councillor Melky believes that this is the final time this Council can put forward or suggest protocols that will lead to better democracy and better representation. He believes that Wards are inevitable and this Council needs to ensure that Town Camps are encompassed in a specific way that allows them to have one representative. Councillor Melky has expressed that he is in favour of Wards.

Councillor Auricht believes that this issue has already been discussed and was agreed to leave it 9 Elected Members. In previous discussions it was agreed that Town Camp residents currently have a voice, like every other resident of Alice Springs, through the current group of Elected Members.

Councillor Cocking has raised this issue a couple of times and would like the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) in partnership with Alice Springs Town Council provide more education and engagement around the value of local government and the value of participating in local elections to the community. Councillor Cocking envisions splitting costs with NTEC to provide workshops leading up to the election focusing on the business of Council, how Council works and the role of the Elected Members.

Mayor Ryan fully supports Councillor Cocking’s view on running public education sessions across the community.

Councillor Banks supports Council collaborating with NTEC or embarking on generating information itself. She is also supportive of developing a more engaged electorate and in her opinion the threshold should be the target to increase voter participation.

Councillor Auricht strongly believes that Council needs to work in collaboration with the NTEC to ensure there is one education strategy presented to the community.

Deputy Mayor Paterson is in support of Councillor Cocking’s comments on education. He believes that increasing the threshold to around 1,800 people is important. Deputy Mayor Paterson has expressed that he does not support Wards as he would like to represent the whole of Alice Springs.

9.3 Council Teleconferencing and Leave of Absence Process Report No. 75/20 cs (GM)

In response to the COVID-19 restrictions applied to gatherings and compliance with the Local Government Act, this report recommends endorsement of a new Teleconferencing policy which clearly and concisely articulates the requirements regarding the use of teleconferencing for meetings of Council and Council committees.

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council

That Council adopt the new Teleconferencing policy, superseding policy 102B Audio/Audio Visual Attendance at Council meetings.

(14 cs)

Councillor Melky referred to Attachment A, Teleconferencing policy, where it excludes the public and he believes the policy needs to make provisions for the public. He referred to the Policy statement, *“General public (non-media) will not have access to Council teleconferencing but may continue to participate in the Council decision making process via all other existing methods in accordance with the Alice Springs (Council Meetings and Procedures) By-laws 2008”*, and believes that it contravenes with the Local Government Act which makes Council non-transparent and not inclusive.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that the proposed Teleconferencing policy is not breaching the Local Government Act.

The Director Corporate Services stated Council received a letter on the 26 March 2020 from the Local Government Housing and Community Development providing dispensation to all councils in relation to the members of public attending meetings, especially during this time of COVID-19. It is not the intent of this policy to exclude members of the public in the future.

Councillor Auricht enquired if meeting papers are available to the public prior to the meetings and whether there is an opportunity for them to submit comments or questions in relation to the agenda.

The Chief Executive Officer responded that meeting papers are available to the public prior to the meetings through the website. It has also been advertised that if a community member has a specific topic of enquiry for a meeting, either arising from the papers or another question, they are encouraged to email Council at eaexecutive@astc.nt.gov.au by COB the Friday prior to the relevant Council meeting. The recording of the meeting will also be available on the website the day after the meeting.

Councillor Melky would like Council to investigate a way for the general public to have access to the open section of meetings during the pandemic.

Councillor Banks recommended putting this policy in place for a period of time and will be worthwhile to put a review point on this policy to ensure relevance beyond a pandemic. She highlighted the second dot point (page 87) on the policy as well as the seventh dot point (page 88) to be reviewed and expanded.

Councillor de Brenni congratulated the Council officers on making the policy very easy to read and to understand. He believes it is a living document that can be changed at any time to incorporate circumstances.

The Chief Executive Officer will look into how Council can support public participation. The current review of the policy is one year from now. He suggested that if we remove the exclusion of the public participation element, then that should allow the document to be more applicable over the next year.

10. REPORTS OF ADVISORY AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

Nil

11. GENERAL BUSINESS

11.1 Deputy Mayor Paterson – Voucher Scheme

Deputy Mayor Paterson presented a proposal for discussion regarding the introduction of a voucher scheme to the municipality of Alice Springs in response to the current COVID-19 situation.

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council

That ASTC introduce a voucher scheme for the 20/21 FY to all rateable properties in the municipality to the amount of \$300 per property. These vouchers are to be spent on local businesses in Alice Springs.

(15 cs)

Deputy Mayor Paterson provided the following supporting details:

- *How Does this Work?* - Each rateable property is given vouchers that amount to \$300. These can be spent at businesses throughout Alice Springs who have registered under the scheme. These vouchers can be used at places such as restaurants, cafes, retail outlets etc. Properties can have vouchers sent out, similar to that of the regional waste management facility.
- *Why?* - This could invest \$2,880,300 to businesses in Alice Springs over 9 months. Small business provides much support to Alice Springs through sponsorship, in kind support and much more. By introducing this scheme, it may ensure more businesses continue to operate after the current pandemic has passed.
- *When will vouchers be issued?* - These vouchers are issued in September and December. Vouchers will expire at the end of the 2021 FY. In September, properties will receive 7 x \$20 vouchers, in December properties will receive 8 x \$20 vouchers.
- *Business Portal* - Locally owned businesses apply to be registered under the scheme, businesses can promote that they are a part of the scheme and can be put on the ASTC website. ASTC could also approach the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation to work collaboratively on the scheme.
- *Who is eligible?* - Owner/s of every rateable property receives the vouchers. You will receive as many vouchers as properties you own. (eg. If you own 3 properties, you are eligible for 3 x \$300 worth of vouchers.)
- *Cost* - Total cost of the vouchers will be \$2,880,300. Administration costs are also required. This is estimated at 1 fulltime position for 12 months.
- *Budget line* -

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| City Deals Project Line - | \$949,785 (Currently \$949,785) |
| Town Beautification - | \$500,000 (Currently \$810,406 in reserves) |
| Todd Mall Beautification - | \$1,430,515 (Currently \$2,704,430 in reserves) |
| Total - | \$2,880,300 |

Councillor Cocking asked if there are precedents for councils or Local Government handing out vouchers or cash to local business directly or is this completely unprecedented.

Deputy Mayor Paterson will enquire as to precedents set by other councils. The Chief Executive Officer advised that the NT Government is currently looking at a similar proposal and suggested tying it to that system so there is no duplication. Council currently have a voucher scheme in place through the Regional Waste Management Facility, but Council can conduct an investigation into this proposed scheme.

Councillor Melky asked if the funds that are being redirected from the three identified projects will be replaced or if the Deputy Mayor's intentions were that they would no longer go ahead. If the money would be returned to those reserves, there would be a significant future rate hike of 12.18%.

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised he had no intentions of passing on a 12.18% rate rise to cover the funds he has identified. These budget lines can be redirected back into the community to have a positive effect. Redirecting the funds into the voucher scheme mean that the projects will not be able to go ahead.

Councillor Melky asked about the operational cost of the vouchers. Deputy Mayor Paterson has considered the administration cost as stated in the proposal, however, he did not include an operational cost as he believes that this is an operational matter.

Councillor Melky asked if the Deputy Mayor would consider further the approach where the people that most likely need it are homeowner occupier rather than the investor.

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised that the ratepayers are the ones that we ask to fund our services every year. After this pandemic, it would be a tough time for rate payers and owners of properties. They have risked investing in our community, this is a way of giving back and also prioritising the support of small businesses in the community.

Councillor Cocking enquired that if this proposal goes ahead, will something similar to the RWMF voucher system be considered, advocating that tenants are given access to these vouchers in a prescriptive way as opposed to the generosity of the landlord. Also, are we looking at targeting those who need it most, such as casual workers who have lost their jobs?

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised that it is up to the ratepayers to pass on the voucher, if they want to. In regard to the casual workers, this is an opportunity for small businesses to keep some casual workers employed through this voucher scheme.

Mayor Ryan would like to note that our community needs are our commitment right now. Mayor Ryan can see the advantages in creating a voucher system rather than just reducing rates. He believes it is a creative way of putting money back into local businesses and the ratepayers of Alice Springs.

Councillor Melky asked if the Deputy Mayor has considered how much our hardship will cost Council when people apply. Deputy Mayor Paterson advised that the \$2.8M may prevent some businesses from needing to apply for hardship relief. Unfortunately, some businesses may not, but it may keep the doors open for some businesses.

Councillor Melky noted the timeline of this scheme and would like some more modeling for this scheme as he believes this money could be spent more wisely.

Councillor de Brenni suggested that the Deputy Mayor sit down with the Chief Executive Officer and Director Corporate Services to get their advice using their extensive expertise on this scheme.

Councillor Satour asked which officers Deputy Mayor Paterson has had conversations with concerning this proposal and who within the Elected Members group this discussed with. She also questioned the date the scheme will commence. Councillor Satour would like to see the scheme extended to small business owners and the unemployed.

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised he has spoken with the CEO and had sent this proposal to all Elected Members prior to the meeting. He said the scheme will be split into two and will commence in September, with the second half commencing in December. These dates can be negotiated.

Councillor Price congratulated Deputy Mayor Paterson for coming up with this idea and supports a scheme that promotes shop local. She understands the comments around non-rate payers accessing the scheme but noted that the NT and Federal Government are ensuring those individuals and their families are being supported during this pandemic.

Councillor Cocking left the meeting at 7:22pm

Councillor Banks asked how many local businesses may be eligible to apply to this scheme.

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised it would be difficult to provide an answer without having the number of businesses who would register. He has spoken to some businesses in Alice Springs who have said they would register for the scheme.

Councillor Banks asked what would be the criteria for a local business to be eligible to apply to this scheme?

Deputy Mayor Paterson has suggested working together with the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation, as they are doing something similar with their “Save our business” scheme. The details of eligibility will be discussed with the Chief Executive Officer. He envisions all local Alice Springs businesses (cafe, retail, restaurant, etc) will be eligible.

Councillor Banks mentioned that businesses will need to be supported in the registration process, especially considering the volume of individual vouchers. She asked how giving rate payers \$300 vouchers would be better for the economy over works commencing on the projects the funding is proposed to be redirected from.

Deputy Mayor Paterson believes it is not a good look having businesses closed in the CBD or the Mall, which is why he has proposed redirecting \$500,00 from the Town Beautification project and 1.4M from the Todd Mall Beautification Project. Supporting small businesses and keeping them open is important for the town.

Councillor Banks would like to see substantiated evidence around where this model has worked so we can be assured this is a good spend of money. Councillor Banks asked how this scheme will produce better outcomes economically than investment in jobs through the process of local tendering and building, which is a standard economic growth model?

Deputy Mayor advised that the NT Government have given the construction sector a stimulus package to keep people in jobs. It is important to understand that spending money will help businesses and spending money in the economy will help people during the months of September and December going forward.

Councillor Banks asked how the voucher scheme will keep people employed and what percentage of vouchers will be supplied to rate payers who have investment properties but do not live in Alice Springs; what consideration has been given to those who don't pay rates directly, such as tenants of commercial businesses?

Deputy Mayor Paterson advised that any small business would appreciate \$20 they would not have had otherwise. It would allow ratepayers to get out, go for lunch or coffee. In regard to investment properties, these rate payers took the risk of investing in Alice Springs by owning a property. It is up to the owner of the property how they want to spend the vouchers or pass them to tenants if they want to. The opportunity for businesses renting is that they are able to accept the vouchers through the scheme.

Councillor Cocking returned to the meeting at 7:25pm

Councillor Melky acknowledged the Deputy Mayor for bringing up the idea of the voucher scheme and noted the following points to be considered in the scheme:

- 3,000 investment properties in Alice Springs, resulting in approximately \$900,000 of the scheme funds going to owners of properties who have tenants. Unless there is a condition that the voucher goes to the tenant and not to the owner, the scheme has no advantage to the economy, as a large percentage of these owners do not live in town. The \$300 will not come back to the economy unless they pass this on to someone. Significant proof is required as to how the money will go back to the economy.
- Referral to jobs – the Federal government has introduced the 'job saver scheme' of \$1,500 a fortnight
- Duplication of assistance to the community, as Council has already approved hardship subsidy to ratepayers
- Todd Mall is an important part of the community where business and traders pay high premium rent. This is one of the three projects the voucher scheme will draw funds from. Todd Mall traders would also need support as much as possible.

Deputy Mayor Paterson noted all the comments and questions from Elected Members and would respond to them accordingly before the next Ordinary Council meeting.

11.2 Councillor Melky – ASTC COVID-19 Community Care, Adapt, Recovery Plan

Councillor Melky presented a proposal for Council to consider that will deliver care in the short term, adapt for the medium term and launch a recovery plan for the long term by taking a best practice approach.

Best Practice Approach:

- Understand rate of income
- Loss of Council income - \$813,900 rates and charges
- Plan to CARE – waiver/concession rates - \$1,142,000,000
- Residential rate reduction – 5% reduction; freeze on rating rates for 2 FY
- Freeze on raising business/commercial property rates
- Plan to ADAPT – adjust and consolidate Council service assessment - \$3,172,700
- RECOVERY – begin the Alice Springs Town Economic Recovery by consolidating and reducing spending over the next 2 years
- Council can borrow money; partnership with other organisations; seek Government funding; build new Library
- Invest by supporting businesses to help re-establish and kickstart their recovery; incentive to attract university graduates back home to work and live here; incentive to retain retirees who leave town for a sea change; attract and grow our population by providing incentives for home buyers with reduced rates on first year of ownership.

RESOLVED

That it be a recommendation to Council

- A. That in response to the COVID-19 crisis, Council set a budget for 2020/2021 that provides a 5% rate reduction on residential property based on the budget as set during 2019/2020.**
- B. That in response to the COVID-19 crisis Council set a budget for 2021/2022 with a rate rise freeze on the Residential property based on the 2019/2020 budget.**

(16 cs)

Councillor de Brenni has concerns about selling off our parks and Art collection. He has asked what Councillor Melky believes we could get for our Art and Parks. Councillor de Benni does agree with the rate reduction.

Councillor Melky advised that if council really needs to spend \$85,000 on arts display them somewhere else. He also agrees that there needs to be consultation and research in selling parks.

Councillor Cocking asked the Chief Executive Officer and Director Corporate Services on how the Asset Management plan is progressing. An updated plan may assist with giving all Elected Members a good understanding of what Councillor Melky is putting forward.

The Chief Executive Officer responded that Council does have an Asset Management plan however, Council officers are looking for a more advanced document for which the process will take longer than required for the budget process. Council will be putting in estimates on the Asset Management Plan based on the numbers available with a more advanced Asset Plan in the long term.

Councillor Cocking commented that the Federal and NT Governments are forking out vast amounts of money to avoid potential economic collapse. He supported the idea of doing everything necessary to have “shovel ready projects” to take advantage of the governments’ stimulus packages, especially projects that offer strategic value to the community. Council needs to consider what reserves should be maintained and which ones should not, to make sure that there are projects ready to go when the recovery period starts. Councillor Cocking commended Deputy Mayor Paterson and Councillor Melky for the proposals they have put forward.

Councillor de Brenni asked where the deduction from Correctional Services is intended and what the impact on staff will be. He also asked how Council will pay for the storage of the arts and where it will be stored.

Councillor Melky commented that due to the lockdown, the correctional workers service is not operating and won't be operating for quite some time. Their budget has been fully expended and therefore the remaining funds may be redirected.

Deputy Mayor Paterson enquired where Councillor Melky got the expected loss of Council income figures in relation to the Waste Management Facility, Pool and parking.

Councillor Melky noted that the figures are taken based on a three to six months loss. It is a conservative figure and is open to more analysis.

Councillor Cocking is interested to know how many people claim the hardship allowance over the next three to six months as this would determine Council's long-term budget and would have a significant effect going forward.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that, through this discussion, Council officers have prepared some notes on both proposals and would work with Deputy Mayor Paterson and Councillor Melky to further develop their schemes for Council's consideration at the end of the month.

Councillor Satour noted the two proposals and felt that one was backed up with a considerable amount of information as opposed to the other which lacked supporting documentation, but she looks forward to further discussion at the end of the month.

Councillor Melky commented that this plan is a consolidation of Elected Members' feedback and ideas over the previous months which he incorporated into a plan.

11.3 Councillor Melky- Confidential Leak Information

Councillor Melky would like Council to consider at the next Ordinary Meeting a proposal to put a cash reward as an incentive for people to step forward who could give the name/s of people leaking confidential Council information, which could potentially lead to prosecution of these individual/s.

12. NEXT MEETING: **Monday 11 May 2020**

The meeting stands adjourned and resumes in the Confidential Section.

The meeting adjourned at 8:19pm

Confirmed on _____

CHAIRPERSON _____

Date _____