



“FROM THE GM’S DESK” 9TH APRIL 2020



Bourke Community Centre

Work has commenced on the refurbishment of the Bourke Community Centre which was previously known as the Senior Citizens Centre. It has been some time since any significant work has been undertaken at the facility. The refurbishment was well overdue and will enable greater usage by community groups. The work being undertaken is in keeping with Council’s strategy of maintaining and upgrading existing assets.

The building has previously been used for a variety of purposes, including ‘Flicks in the Sticks’, a Needlecraft Group, a Seniors’ Exercise group and various meetings.

Works will include the installation of a new kitchen, new floor coverings, reverse cycle air-conditioning, general repairs, upgrade of bathroom facilities, replacement of doors and new window furnishings.

Council staff will be preparing a Plan of Management in respect of the use of the building.

Whilst current circumstances do not enable the use of such facilities, it is hoped that the refurbished facility will see increased patronage from existing and potential user groups post the current socialisation restrictions.

Council Meetings are now permitted to be held with Councillors participating via Audio Visual Linkages

As mentioned last week, the way Council meetings will be conducted over the next few months will change dramatically.

Amendments have been made to the Local Government Act to allow Councils to meet remotely to reduce the potential risk of transmission of COVID-19 and ensure compliance with the recently gazetted NSW Public Health Order.

For the next six (6) months Councillors can participate in meetings by an audio-visual link instead of attending in person. Council meetings can be held entirely remotely by audio-visual link.

Alternatively, where Councils elect to continue meeting face-to-face, individual Councillors are permitted to elect to participate in that meeting by audio-visual link.

Requirements for members of the public to be permitted to attend meetings can now be satisfied by live streaming the meeting using an audio-visual link.

The Minister for Local Government can approve other arrangements for satisfying the requirements for Councillors and members of the public to “attend” meetings, but only if audio-visual links are not reasonably available.

Over coming weeks, Council Staff will be trialling the conduct of meetings by various platforms to ensure that the amended way of doing business proceeds smoothly.

Postponement of the September 2020 Local Government Elections

The Minister for Local Government has announced that the September 2020 Local Government elections will be postponed addressing the risks posed by COVID-19 with the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) being amended to confer on the Minister, a time-limited power to postpone Council Elections.

The amendment, which operates for only a limited period of 12 months, allows the Minister by an order published in the Gazette, to postpone elections for 12 months from the date of the order. The order may be extended for an additional period to 31 December in the year after the order is made.

The postponement of the next election will not change the future schedule of Council elections, and the subsequent election will still proceed in September 2024.

What this will mean for Bourke Shire Council?

Where the Minister exercises the power to postpone elections, the election requirements of the Act are suspended for the period specified in the order and current Councillors will continue to hold their civic offices.

Popularly elected Mayors will continue to hold their office until an ordinary election is held. In the case of Mayors elected by Councillors, Mayoral elections will need to be held for Mayors elected in September 2018 when their two year-terms expire in September 2020. This will be the situation for Bourke. Mayors elected in September 2019 will continue to hold office until September 2021, once the election date is determined.

COVID-19 Webinar for Local Councils

The Office of Local Government recently hosted the second of what will be a series of webinars for Mayors and General Managers of all New South Wales Councils in regard to COVID 19.

The webinars to date have involved both the NSW Minister for Health, the Hon Brad Hazzard MP; NSW Chief Health Officer, Dr Kerry Chant; and the CEO of the NSW Office of Local Government, Mr Tim Hurst.

The webinars are designed to give all Councils up to date and consistent messaging in relation to the virus, particularly as it applies to Local Government in NSW.

The webinars also provide the opportunity for Councils to send through questions to both the Minister and Dr Chant. As expected, many of the questions relate not only to the Council raised the issues but also to most, if not all, the Councils attending the webinar.

The New Way of Doing Business – Audio-visual - Teleconferences

The way in which business is transacted and meetings held has changed dramatically over the past few weeks with the unfolding situation regarding COVID-19.

We have already seen legislation put in place to allow Council Meetings to be held via audio-visual means.

The use of teleconference facilities has also extended to meetings of both the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) and the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC). (The Western NSW Local Health District has also used the same medium to host meetings involving Local Councils within the area.

Despite the often large numbers of persons participating in these virtual meetings, the teleconferences have been held in an orderly fashion with participants being mindful of the numbers.

Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC)

The LEMC involves organisations who may be asked to respond to emergency situations and includes representatives from Police, Health, Ambulance, Fire & Rescue NSW, Family and Community Services, Local Land Services, Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Council. It has usually met on a quarterly basis, but of late has been meeting twice weekly.

As required, the LEMC have asked other agencies to participate in meetings so that any issues that need to be dealt with by the LEMC can be done so with accurate advice being available.

Issues that the LEMC felt should be escalated to the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) are forwarded through and if deemed necessary these are able to be further escalated to the State Emergency Committee.

Council Draft Operational Plan (Budget) 2020/2021

The first draft of the Operational Plan for 2020/2021 was presented to the Ordinary Meeting of Council on Monday 23rd March 2020 where it was approved for advertising.

The Operational Plan had previously been subject to review and amendment by the Corporate Planning Committee of Bourke Shire Council on Monday 16th March 2020.

All submissions are required to be considered by Council prior to the adoption of the Operational Plan and this will be done at the May Council Meeting.

As part of the community consultation process copies of the Draft Operational Plan for 2020/2021 were to be available at the Council Offices and the Library. However, Public access to both is now not available and residents and rate payers should review the document on line at www.bourke.nsw.gov.au If you are unable to access the document and would like to review it arrangements can be made for a copy to be made available by contacting 02 68 308 000.

Consistent Messaging

To ensure that there is a high level of consistent messaging for residents within the Bourke Shire Local Government Area from a single source, the Bourke Local Emergency Management Committee have established a Coronavirus Facebook information page for the Shire, titled Bourke Community COVID-19 Information.

The information will also be provided via a link on Councils Website. <https://bourke.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/>

It is important that the messaging that is given to the public is both accurate at the time of release and consistent with the messaging provided by Health Authorities.

All information posted through the page has to go through an approval process which can be started by contacting Council's Offices.

In an emergency or urgent situation this can also be done after hours by utilising the on-call number 0419 722 055.

Easter

Easter this year will be a very different occasion with only essential travel being permitted. Police will be out in force and I am sure they will be making enquiries as to why people are travelling. Many people will be undoubtedly turned back, if not fined. Save the drama and have a facetime hook up with your family and friends and simply stay at home and don't have visitors.

For the purposes of clarity, Councils kerb side garbage collection service will operate as per normal on the public holidays of the long weekend. For emergencies over the Easter weekend, Councils contact number is 0419 722 055.

Quote of the week!

"We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone."

Rev Dr. Loretta Scot

Ross Earl
General Manager

