



“From the GM’s Desk”

7th MAY 2020



LIBRARY SERVICES

Even though we are closed at the moment, the library still has plenty to offer for children. On our BorrowBox app you can find a wide range of eBooks and eAudio for kids, including some fantastic titles from Disney and ABC eAudio. We have also purchased eBooks from the Premiers Reading Challenge book lists so that children can still work on completing the Challenge this year. If anyone would like a list of titles available for each age group email the library at bpl@bourkelibrary.com.au.

We held our first craft by Zoom session last weekend, and it went very well, so we will continue to offer this service weekly on Saturday afternoons at 1:00pm. If anyone would like to join, contact the library by email or leave a message on Facebook. Printable craft activities are provided for the sessions. We also have printable craft activities available on our website, www.bourkelibrary.com.au, in the Kids Space section. We have created a new area called 'Iso Kids' with printable craft activities, information on library resources, online story times and links to some excellent online resources.

As we cannot hold story time sessions in the library we have subscribed to an online service called Story Box Library. Story Box Library has a diverse range of engaging storytellers reading aloud children's titles, and is available through our website with your library card. We are also providing links to online story time sessions by other libraries both on our website and our Facebook page.

Also available online we have two (2) fantastic databases: Britannica Library and World Book Online. These online databases both have all the information from their encyclopaedias available in an appealing format and in a range of age levels, from preschool to high school level. In World Book Online you can also find eBook and fun activities for kids.

Make sure to check out our website, www.bourkelibrary.com.au, and like our Facebook page to keep up to date with what's happening. If you would like any more information you can email us at bpl@bourkelibrary.com.au or leave a message on our Facebook page.

FREE ONLINE TAFE COURSES ON OFFER

The NSW Government has announced the availability of 13 new fee-free TAFE NSW short courses to assist anyone across the State who wants to upskill during the COVID-19 pandemic.

So far, some 85,000 people have enrolled in the fee-free courses following their announcement some three (3) weeks ago to assist job seekers and workers.

The new short courses include:-

- Leading Teams,
- Digital Security Basics,
- Building your Digital Literacy with Coding
- Creating a Brand Presentation, and
- Undertaking Projects and Managing Risk.

Residents are encouraged to take advantage of these fee-free courses, with further information being available at the following TAFE NSW link: <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/fee-free-short-courses>.

NSW GOVERNMENT STIMULUS PACKAGE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – JOB RETENTION ALLOWANCE

On Sunday, 26 April 2020, the NSW Government announced a \$395 million “Local Government Economic Stimulus Package” to reduce the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 128 local Councils across the State.

The stimulus package is comprised of four (4) components:

- The Council Job Retention Allowance,
- Funding to meet Councils’ increase in the Emergency Services Levy for 2020-21,
- Access to low-interest, infrastructure loans from TCorp in line with TCorp’s credit criteria, and
- Access, subject to meeting certain requirements, to a NSW Government guarantee for commercial borrowings.

The \$112.5 million Job Retention Allowance, to be paid to those Councils who meet the funding criteria, would result in a payment of \$1,500 per fortnight being made to eligible employees who are stood down from employment with a Council due to the virus. This package follows the decision of the Federal Government not to include Council employees as part of the JobKeeper program. It would not be a payment in addition to other Government employee payment initiatives.

To access this component of the package, Councils will have to provide evidence to Government that they have experienced financial distress as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In this regard, Councils will need to be projecting a 30% reduction in own-source revenue for a particular quarterly period. Own source revenue includes rates, annual charges and user fees and charges.

TEMPORARY RELIEF FROM THE EMERGENCY SERVICE LEVY

The NSW Government will also fully fund the \$32.76 million increase in the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) for all NSW Councils for 2020-21. By way of background, under NSW State/Local Government funding arrangements, Councils contribute financially to the cost of the important work of Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Rural Fire Service and the State Emergency Service. In response to an expected increase in the number of firefighters diagnosed with work-related cancers, laws were introduced at a State level in 2018 that will see those diagnosed with cancer being eligible for worker’s compensation benefits, including loss of income payments, medical treatment expenses and death benefits for those with terminal conditions. To fund these changes, costs have increased with Councils share of the costs also increasing. The Government’s announcement to fully fund the increase in 2020-21 is appreciated.

MEETINGS TO BE HELD BY AUDIO VISUAL LINK

There has been some confusions as to whether Councillors should be able to attend Council meetings in person given the provisions of the Public Health Order.

The Office of Local Government has sought to clarify the situation and has issued a circular in relation to the matter which says in part:-

- *Minister Hazzard has directed under clause 5 of the Public Health Order that a person must not, without reasonable excuse, leave the person’s place of residence.*
- *A reasonable excuse includes doing an activity specified by Schedule 1 of the Order. Clause 2 of Schedule 1 refers to “travelling for the purposes of work if the person cannot work from the person’s place of residence” as a “reasonable excuse”.*
- *This means that where a Council has or can make arrangements for Councillors to attend meetings remotely by an audio-visual link, Councillors who leave their homes to physically attend meetings may potentially be in breach of the Minister for Health’s direction under clause 5 of the Public Health Order.*

- *Where any or all Councillors and any other persons (i.e. key staff whose attendance is required at the meeting) are not able to attend meetings remotely by an audio-visual link, (e.g. because they do not have access to the necessary technology or internet coverage to allow them to do so), they could continue to be permitted to physically attend meetings subject to compliance with the social distancing requirements described in circular 20-09.*
- *Mayors may also be permitted to physically attend the Council chamber or another venue for the purposes of chairing a meeting where they cannot reasonably or effectively do so via an audio-visual link.*

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING 25 MAY 2020

The next Ordinary Meeting of Council is scheduled for the 25 May commencing at 9.15 am. Given the meeting is likely to again be held via Audio Visual Link members of the public who would like to make any submission in relation to an item on the agenda should do so in writing via email or letter addressed to the General Manager and to reach him no later than 8.30am on the day of the meeting.

Included on the agenda will be the consideration of the DRAFT Operational Plan for 2020/2021.

With the disruptions caused by Covid-19 Councils have an additional month to prepare and adopt the Operational Plan. Bourke Shire Council has for the past eight years ensured the early preparation of the DRAFT Operational Plan.

As such Council is well positioned having already completed the DRAFT Operational Plan for 2020/2021. Council and staff held a workshop to discuss the inclusions within the DRAFT Operational Plan in early March and at the Ordinary Meeting of Council in March approved the DRAFT document for advertising.

Part of the advertising provisions enables residents and ratepayers to lodge submissions in relation to the Operational Plan and the Local Government Act provides that a Council must consider all those submissions lodged prior to the adoption of the DRAFT Operational Plan.

NEED TO ENSURE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES ARE TO MEETING CHALLENGES

COVID-19 has meant some significant changes in the way we do business with many meetings being held via the various platforms that are available including, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GO to Meetings and Blue Jeans to mention but a few.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 meant that an equally rapid response was required from the IT sections of businesses and Government agencies to ensure that they were able to respond to the changes and challenges that were presented. This included ensuring that staff had both the required access and facilities to work from home if needed, and ensure that essential functions such as payroll and creditors could continue to ensure staff, suppliers and contactors were able to be paid.

In addition to this was the need to ensure connectivity to meetings.

The emerging pandemic situation put pressure on IT staff to respond to the challenges and Bourke Shires Manager IT, Damian Slack-Smith responded to those challenges and was able to ensure that Council was able to continue to undertake business despite the rapidly changing business environment.

This include ensuring that Council had the ability to conduct an audio visual Council meeting for the first time and concurrently having that meeting livestreamed as required to ensure that the legislative requirement to have “public Access “to the meeting was available.

Well done Damian!

COUNCILLORS TO HAVE COMPUTERS FOR ACCESS TO BUSINESS PAPERS AND OTHER INFORMATION

Prior to the next meeting of Council all Councillors will be issued with “tablets” via which they that can access their business papers and other documents.

Hard copies or paper copies of the business papers will still be able to be provided if required however, if there is a general acceptance that the paperless technology provides an adequate alternative then we will see hard copies be a thing of the past.

Councillors will have the opportunity to participate in a webinar to familiarise themselves with the tablets, prior to the next meeting of Council.

The use of the tablets will save a considerable amount in printing costs and also negate the need for Councillors to have to store old meeting papers and other information with it now being able to be stored electronically and also be much more accessible,

CLASSIFICATION OF LAND AS OPERATIONAL

Bourke Shire Council has recently acquired two (2) new parcels of land and at the meeting held last week classified those properties as Operational in accordance with section 31 of The Local Government Act 1993.

The recently properties purchased are at 14 Glen Street and 27 Mitchell Street Bourke.

Under the provisions of section 25 of the Local Government Act 1993 a Council must classify all public land.

Section 26 provides that there are only two (2) applicable classifications, that of “community land” and that of “operational land”.

In general terms:

- **Community land** comprises Council owned land that is kept for use by the general public, such as a park or public hall. The Local Government Act 1993 also requires that Council prepare a plan of management of such land. Community Land cannot be sold and lease of such land requires the ability to lease the land to be included in any Plan of Management in respect to the property
- **Operational land** ordinarily comprises land held as a temporary asset or as an investment, land which facilitates the carrying out by a Council of its functions or land which may not be open to the general public, such as a pump station or a Council depot. It also includes land that Council may wish to sell for residential or industrial type development.

ROADS UPDATE

The work on the Hungerford Road, South-East of Fords Bridge is progressing well with sealing of of the first 3.8 kilometres due to be undertaken on the 12 May 2020.

Storm Damage repairs are in progress on the West Culgoa Road and whilst the ability of Council to access the roads to undertake the much needed repairs has been disrupted by water over the road, every effort is being made to undertake the work as soon as possible.

Council understands the the inconvenience caused to residents along the road and thanks them for their patience.

Quote of the week!

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organisational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." – Andrew Carnegie

Ross Earl
General Manager