

Item 11

City Recovery - Organisational Recovery Plan

File No: X034687.001

Summary

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation of gathering and movement restrictions under public health orders, the City of Sydney has moved quickly to support the community, ensure our residents and employees are safe and to continue to deliver and adjust critical services as needed.

On 9 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced a national roadmap for the easing of lockdown restrictions. The plan is a gradual, three staged approach to allowing more businesses to open, more people return to work and more personal freedoms. Implementation of the roadmap is at the discretion of each state Premier with National Cabinet in agreement that all three stages should be complete by July 2020.

The NSW Government started lifting restrictions from 15 May 2020 and the City has been gradually re-opening facilities and restarting services, following the enactment of the amended public health orders, since that time.

As we look to our recovery, "re-opening" presents many challenges. The health and economic impacts of Covid-19 are still unfolding, the timelines for lifting restrictions remain fluid, and while restrictions may ease, physical distancing and enhanced hygiene will remain a way of life for the foreseeable future.

The City has a responsibility to "re-open" in a way that ensures any services reinstated can be delivered safely for our employees, contractors and the community. Additionally, it must be reasonably practical and viable to re-open.

This report summarises the City's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and outlines the City's own adapted three step CovidSAFE plan for the re-opening of facilities, offices and services.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council note:

- (A) the Organisational Recovery Plan as shown at Attachment A to the subject report; and
- (B) the City of Sydney three step CovidSAFE Roadmap, as shown at Attachment B to the subject report, as a guide for re-opening of services.

Attachments

Attachment A. Organisational Recovery Plan Summary

Attachment B. City of Sydney CovidSAFE Roadmap

Background

1. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 a global health emergency. With over 1.2 million visitors coming into the city every day, the City moved quickly to respond to the crisis.
2. The City convened its Crisis Management Team (CMT) on 3 February 2020 and immediately activated its Pandemic Response Plan, with each business unit and service activating its own Business Continuity Plan.
3. The City also worked with emergency management stakeholders, including NSW Police, emergency services, Health NSW, and Transport for NSW to assist in the coordination of a whole of government response across key pressure points.
4. 'The Resilient Sydney' Program became a forum for Sydney councils to share critical resources and expertise on impacts and responses. Global cities on the frontline of the pandemic provided insights on the lessons learned; the logistics of maintaining critical services with physical distancing were discussed and template documents for activating emergency response plans, communications plans and organisational and community recovery were shared amongst councils.
5. The forum became the channel for councils in Sydney to collectively raise key issues with various government agencies such as NSW Health, NSW Police and the Office of Emergency Management, ensuring rapid responses and quick consistent decision-making by councils.
6. By 12 March 2020, Covid-19 would be declared a pandemic, with 128 cases confirmed in Australia.
7. On 16 March 2020, with Covid-19 case numbers rising in Sydney, the City transitioned all employees who could work remotely to protect their health and safety and assist in efforts to limit community transmission of the virus. New policies and technology were rapidly deployed to support a large working from home workforce.
8. On 18 March 2020, the City announced the closure of community venues, gyms and aquatic centres and cancelled or postponed all non-essential events. The closures pre-empted the announcement of restrictions from the National Cabinet, with the Lord Mayor stating "the safety of our community and staff is our top priority."
9. On 22 March 2020, with 1,549 cases confirmed in Australia and a transmission rate of 28 per cent, the Prime Minister announced stage one restrictions, closing non-essential businesses and services across the country.
10. The City has maintained its essential services throughout this period, with over 800 City employees continuing to deliver frontline services every day at the height of the pandemic. All essential services to the community were maintained and increased where necessary. This included childcare and family services, homelessness outreach, meals on wheels, street cleansing and domestic waste services, infrastructure and park maintenance, and City Rangers who worked closely with NSW Police on community education about physical distancing.
11. As the situation continued to change, regular clear and concise communication to keep employees informed became critical to ensuring continuity of service. Covid-19 specific resources were created and regularly updated to enable employees to respond and adapt and regular support was provided to managers.

12. The City focused on ensuring all external communications through our website and social media platforms were clear, consistent and responsive. Public information around Covid-19 included updates and announcements related to changes or disruptions to the City's services, the relaying of Government messages and links to support and resources. Specific information was also provided raising awareness of the City's Covid-19 grant program and encouraging businesses to complete the recovery plan survey.
13. The health and economic effects of Covid-19 have had an acute and disproportional impact on the most vulnerable in our community. This includes thousands of casual and part-time workers in the gig economy without access to government support, stranded international students and temporary visa holders, and elevated levels of risk to our indigenous communities, older residents and people with disabilities. To ensure these communities received the critical support needed throughout the crisis, the City continued to deliver Meals on Wheels, Child and Family Services, and Homelessness Services.
14. City Life also expanded critical services to include food security, providing direct access to support the most vulnerable in the community and connecting local businesses with existing resources and distribution networks to increase food supply. Community venue and library staff are in daily contact with at-risk groups and individuals to check on their welfare and provide support.
15. The City receives over 445,000 requests from the community each year across multiple channels including face-to-face Service Centres, the call center and through digital channels. The pandemic saw all service centres close and the Customer Service team transition to a fully online and remote service model with minimal disruption. New services were also provided such as parking permits for emergency services workers, a new concierge service for businesses impacted by the pandemic and the Community Hotline which has linked many residents and students to critical support services.
16. On 9 May 2020, with transmission rates consistently below one per cent, the Prime Minister announced the easing of lockdown restrictions under the COVIDSAFE Roadmap. The Roadmap was a three-staged approach to gradually easing and lifting restrictions, opening up businesses and services.
17. The City began to shift its focus from responding and adapting to the crisis to planning for recovery, including the re-opening of services under the COVIDSAFE Roadmap. All City business units completed a Recovery Plan. The plans consider:
 - (a) how employees would safely return to the workplace;
 - (b) how to safely re-open facilities, services and spaces;
 - (c) management of potential outbreaks, and
 - (d) response to the relaxing or resumption of restrictions.

18. For consistency and simplicity, the City has adapted the COVIDSAFE Roadmap into its own three step framework for re-opening services. (Refer to Attachment B.)
19. The Organisational Recovery Plan (Attachment A) also summarises:
 - (a) the three step plan for re-opening services and facilities,
 - (b) the City's role and the principles and actions that guide re-opening;
 - (c) the actions that support the Community and Economic Plan; and
 - (d) the key pillars of the City financial response.

Organisational Impact

20. As the City moves through its three step framework to re-open services, there are both short and long term impacts on the organisation.
 - (a) Under the three step plan, there will be a managed and phased return of employees to workplaces with many non-essential staff likely to work part of the week in the workplace and part of the week remotely. More regular online meetings and the use of digital collaboration tools will remain part of our new ways of working.
 - (b) The Government's COVIDSAFE plan includes ongoing requirements of physical distancing, which will see many services disrupted and operating with limited capacity for the foreseeable future. There are also additional operating requirements imposed on services and facilities in order to comply with the COVIDSAFE checklists as services reopen, including requirements to collect and store information for the purposes of facilitating future contact tracing if necessary.
 - (c) The pandemic is transforming the way the community interacts with City services, accelerating the community's use of online digital channels. The City will need to prioritise its digital transformation across all business areas to meet the changed service expectations of our community.
 - (d) Looking to the longer term, all business areas have considered how they will need to adapt, change and transform to support our long term recovery and transformation.

Risks

21. With the health and economic impacts of Covid-19 still unfolding, several operational risks were identified and considered:
- (a) Covid-19 safety plans have been developed by each business area to ensure the safety of employees as we re-open services and workplaces.
 - (b) While strategies to suppress the virus have been successful, outbreaks within the community remain a risk. With over 1.2 million visitors coming into the City every day pre-pandemic, an outbreak or a cluster of cases at a City operated facility or venue would result in immediate closure and service disruption.
 - (c) The economic disruption caused by the pandemic extends into the City's extensive supply chain, encompassing both small suppliers and large strategic contactors. The City's Procurement team and Contract Managers are working with suppliers to ensure service continuity and to support suppliers where we can.

Budget Implications

22. The budget implications of the Organisational Recovery Plan are detailed in the draft 2020/21 Operating and Capital Budget and future year's forward estimates (the subject of separate report in the current report cycle).

Relevant Legislation

23. The re-opening of services will be guided by Public Health Orders issued by NSW Health and guidelines issued by Safe Work Australia.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

24. Critical dates and timeframes will be driven by the federal government's COVIDSAFE Roadmap and the NSW Government. These remain deliberately fluid and subject to advice by NSW Health.

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