

Item 3.2

Continuing Emergency – Food Relief

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Our community has been severely impacted by the Coronavirus. While strict physical distancing rules have been essential in containing the spread of Covid-19, these lifesaving measures have also had a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of people in our community.

The economic output of our Local Government Area is forecast to contract as much as 12.5 per cent this financial year, compared with a forecast national decline of 6.5 per cent.

If the Federal Government cuts back its JobKeeper and JobSeeker programs in September, the Australian Council of Social Service says this could lead to a devastating increase in unemployment and financial hardship.

Homelessness NSW forecasts around 16,000 people could become homeless across the State unless the stimulus packages are retained.

We cannot leave people to face severe economic hardship without support during the current crisis. It is not acceptable that people could be without access to food as things worsen.

The urgent need for food support in our community

Addison Road Community Centre tell us they used to see 2,000 people a week seeking access to food, which has increased to 5 to 7,000 during the pandemic.

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of OzHarvest Ronni Kahn recently commented that ordinary people “who thought they would never find themselves in troubled circumstances, are now reaching out for help – and they need it urgently.”

I had a roundtable via Zoom recently with representatives of the charities’ sector as part of the City’s consultation on Covid-19 recovery planning. They spoke about the future being challenging, especially if JobKeeper dries up and JobSeeker returns to Newstart levels, and how this sector will need to help our communities cope with poverty and unemployment, isolation, mental health issues, substance abuse, and fears of a second wave of the pandemic.

The City's strong response to providing support

Early in the pandemic, the City identified access to food as a significant issue and an emergency response was required. On 30 March 2020, Council unanimously agreed to donate \$1 million to OzHarvest to help meet the needs of vulnerable groups.

Working with OzHarvest and 60 community organisations, as well as our Meals on Wheels program, the City has been delivering over 20,000 meals and 1,500 staples' bags a week across the Local Government Area. The City's community hotline is linking vulnerable individuals and groups to this network of support providing food support in the City.

An operational group of key agencies has been set up to identify at-risk people across the Local Government Area, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, social housing tenants, older residents, young people and people with disabilities.

A partnership with the NSW Parliamentary Catering Service is providing main meals at cost-price to homeless people in temporary accommodation. A free supermarket with food and essential items will open soon in Waterloo and we've also established a weekly food collection point for international students and temporary visa holders, supporting more than 800 people every week.

But beyond those traditional support services, our staff are also working with generous local businesses who are providing food relief, linking them with existing resources and distribution networks.

We also recently provided \$867,618 to 22 services to support food relief initiatives. There are many valuable organisations operating in the City, such the Wayside Chapel who are supporting people and helping them to get access to healthy fresh food.

City staff have told countless stories of the generosity of businesses and residents who have donated funding, resources and their time, like Harris Farm who donate fresh produce. A group of volunteers called Viral Kindness is using a City of Sydney venue to distribute fruit and vegetables to those in need through trusted organisations.

Harnessing community support

We estimate the City's \$1 million in funding to OzHarvest will run out in around August 2020, right at the time when Australia will likely be in its first recession in 29 years, and economists and the charity sector are saying "the worst is yet to come".

Against this backdrop of emergency need, we must support those organisations that provide support to our vulnerable communities.

In the tremendous spirit of co-operation that we have seen from people and businesses across our City during this time, and during the bushfires, I call on our communities and businesses to join us in a fundraising initiative and "pay it forward" to help us care for our most vulnerable people.

I propose Council set up a fundraising appeal where the community, businesses and City staff can donate to help their neighbours who are struggling, directly to OzHarvest who has the scale to service the emerging need across the city, as well as through their links to other local agencies.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) note that this pandemic and the looming economic crisis have created a growing need in our community for support for food services to prevent people from going hungry;
and
- (B) endorse a fundraising appeal to be set up to encourage people in our community, businesses and staff to donate to OzHarvest who can then continue the work they are currently doing to deliver meals in collaboration with the many other community and charity groups across the Local Government Area.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor