

10.5 LATE AGENDA REPORT – DRAFT COVID-19 HARDSHIP POLICY

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ATTACHMENT: Draft COVID – 19 Hardship Policy

SUMMARY

This report seeks Councils approval of the Draft COVID-19 Hardship policy to enable Council Officers to assess and apply rate relief to ratepayers who experience Financial Hardship due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Councils current Rates and Charges Policy No. 3 Version: 1A\B, prescribes the methodology for the raising, changing and collection of Council's rates and charges. The Local Government Act 1933 (TAS) Sections 125,126 and 127 prescribes the process of postponing rates. George Town Council delegations to the General Manager, lists Section 125 as a delegated responsibility to the General Manager.

In the current COVID-19 crisis, and with the fourth instalment of rates due on 31 March 2020, Council Officers have identified the need to establish a policy which will assist in the ability for Principal Ratepayers to apply to Council for rate relief due to financial hardship brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

STRATEGIC PLAN

This policy aligns with Goal 5 -ensure Council listens to and understands community needs and continues to make responsible decisions on behalf of the community.

Key Objective 4 contained within the Council Strategic Plan 2016-2026 says:

- Consistently achieve a high standard of internal financial and governance arrangements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS & RELATED COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

Local Government Act 1993 (TAS)

George Town Council - Rates and Charges Policy No. 3 Version: 1A\B

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The deferring of rates for payment for up to 12 months will have an impact on the cash flow of Council, however this is considered to be minor.

Removal or reversal of interest and penalties to those ratepayers who demonstrate financial hardship due to COVID-19, will result in a minor loss of income.

CONSULTATION

The establishment of a COVID-19 Hardship Policy will be discussed with Councillors at the Workshop on 24 March 2020.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The absence of a policy for rates relief for those experiencing financial hardship due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, results in the risk of Council Officers not having the ability to assist genuine cases. The presence of a policy with clear guidelines for assessment ensures all that cases are treated consistently within the framework of the policy and Council has the ability to assist ratepayers in an uncertain time and time of great need.

OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The attached draft COVID-19 Hardship Policy provides a framework which will guide Council Officers in assessing case by case the impact and financial hardship that ratepayers may present when requesting rates relief.

The policy will provide ratepayers who experience the financial hardship due to COVID-19 an avenue to request rate relief and will ensure consistent and timely assessment of each case.

Council Officers acknowledge the lack of a general Hardship Policy, however consider that immediate action to address the COVID-19 crisis is critical at this time. A general Hardship Policy will be considered as part of the next stage of the Rates Strategy Review in the coming financial year.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Draft COVID-19 Hardship Policy.

DECISION

VOTING

For:

Against: