

MEDIA RELEASE

Issued: Wednesday 25 March 2020

Council moves to meet challenges of COVID-19 pandemic

Following last night's announcement by the Federal Government of expanded social distancing measures, the City of Launceston will transition to internet and telephone-based customer service systems from close of business today.

To comply with the new measures, the following closures will also take place until further notice (including ones already announced):

- Launceston Leisure and Aquatic Centre
- Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (both sites)
- Town Hall Customer Service Centre (front desk)
- Visitor Information Centre
- All Council-owned playgrounds and skate parks, including Riverbend Park, the playgrounds at City Park and Cataract Gorge
- All Council-owned community centres and halls
- Albert Hall for functions and conventions
- All Council-owned barbecue facilities, including Punchbowl Reserve, Heritage Forest and Riverbend Park

All Council parks will remain open, such as City Park and Royal Park.

City of Launceston Mayor Albert van Zetten said the Council's number one priority was the safety and well-being of the Launceston community, Council staff and those people who use the affected Council facilities.

"There will be impacts following these closures, but it's extremely important that the Council follows the advice and directives of the federal and state governments and the Director of Public Health," Mayor van Zetten said.

Mayor van Zetten said that anyone who requires assistance with any Council services can still call the Customer Service hotline on 6323 3000 for all inquiries, email contactus@launceston.tas.gov.au or use the Council's 'Report an Issue' web portal at www.launceston.tas.gov.au/Council/Report-an-Issue

"Alternatively, you can go to our website - www.launceston.tas.gov.au - for all the latest information on the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to access our many online services," Mayor van Zetten said.

All Planning applications currently on public exhibition can be viewed online on the Council's website.

For anyone unable to access the website, all current planning applications are available for viewing during Council's normal businesses hours by booking an appointment on 6323 3220.

"The Council is currently working with the State Government and other councils to provide as much flexibility as possible to progress planning applications throughout this pandemic," Mayor van Zetten said.

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"This situation is unprecedented and we are having to make unprecedented decisions that will affect the everyday lives of people in the Launceston community.

"Ultimately, it is in everyone's interest that we do everything possible to stop the spread of coronavirus.

"From my perspective, it's absolutely heartbreaking to see our business sector in Launceston decimated by this pandemic. To see hardworking people lose their jobs, having to close their small businesses and stand down staff.

"But it is important that we do not lose hope - we will recover. Unfortunately, we just don't know when this will happen.

"However in Tasmania, we have a unique opportunity - being an island state - that if everyone does the right thing, we can have a significant impact on reducing that timeframe."

Mayor van Zetten said the Council was working through the finer details of its Community Care and Rescue Package and will be in a position to announce the details next week.

"That package will look at options such as rates relief for small businesses, fees and charges relief, one-off grants, assistance for the organisers of cancelled events, help for community groups and other support measures," Mayor van Zetten said.

"Ahead of the release of the care and recovery package, we've already taken steps to reduce impacts on small businesses where we can.

"For example, we have put a freeze on rent to businesses who lease Council premises — pending the Council's decision — and have elected not to pass on water or electricity charges to business tenants, and we've introduced a weekly payment system to suppliers instead of fortnightly.

"In addition, we are reminding suppliers that we have negotiable terms on any payments which may be due to us.

"Finally, I would just ask everyone to be mindful of those in our community doing it very tough right now. Be kind, be patient and be considerate of others."