

COVID-19: Councils contribute \$300m to support community



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The Local Government response to COVID-19 is estimated to be in excess of \$325 million – equivalent to \$130 for every person in Western Australia.

Local Government in WA was one of the first sectors to make a meaningful response to the pandemic with real financial and practical initiatives that directly benefit the community.

In perspective, the financial cost of the Local Government response is proportionate to the package provided by the State Government based on the comparative size of the workforce in each sector.

Already most Councils have committed to holding down their rates this year, while some with greater financial capacity are working on offering discounts.

Almost every Local Government that has property tenants has waived rent for at least the short term while others have removed normal fees and charges for services.

In regard to helping stimulate the local economy, Local Governments are bringing forward capital works and fast tracking approvals processes.

In addition to the initiatives that for the most part reduce revenue, Local Governments are also working to redeploy staff and maintain their workforce.

The State Government has urged Councils not to stand down staff so as to help maintain wages and expenditure in local communities but without the support of the Jobkeeper program.

Meanwhile some Local Governments are being told by their communities to stand down employees to save on expenditure.

Every Local Government in WA has taken action to support their local communities through reducing direct costs or adapting services in response to the pandemic.

There is a wide diversity between locations in WA and consequently the scale and capacity of local services, so too is the response able to be achieved by various Local Governments.

For example the City of Karratha has implemented a \$3m package that along with freezing rates and charges, includes grants to community groups, six-months' rent relief for small business in Council properties, supports a buy local campaign and coordinates advice to local businesses.

In the metropolitan area many of the larger Local Governments have estimated their response to COVID-19 at in excess of \$15m. Many other Local Governments have similar comprehensive strategies and even those with less financial capacity are focussed on what measures they can implement.

Such as the Shire of Coolgardie, a Council with total rates of less than \$7m, still managed very early in the crisis to reallocate \$1m from its reserves to support their local economy.

WALGA has also worked to support Local Governments and their communities including underwriting a platform for local suppliers to better access Council contracts and championing the use of reserves from its insurance service to reduce contribution costs.

It is beyond doubt that the Local Government sector in WA is supporting residents and businesses through the pandemic, and I thank the community for their understanding of all that their Councils are doing.

