

Rate relief



Strathbogrie Shire Council has introduced measures designed to assist ratepayers and business owners who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our community has been hard-hit by the standing down of employees, job losses and mandatory closure of businesses. This follows drought, fire and storms in recent times, putting a strain on household budgets. On 5 April 2020, Council announced some changes to help our community through this unprecedented situation.

What relief is Strathbogrie Shire Council offering?

The initiatives are:

- An extension of the due date of the fourth Rate Instalment on property rates to 30 June 2020 (instead of 31 May 2020).
- No overdue/outstanding interest to be added to assessments for the period from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.
- The refund of any previously paid business registration fees for this financial year to become a registered premise, which includes food business, hairdressers, etc.

As part of its 2020-21 Budget deliberations, Council will consider a no fee arrangement for business registrations and footpath trading.

Who does the extension of rates payment to 30 June 2020 apply to?

The extension applies to all current Strathbogrie Shire ratepayers. The fourth instalment rates notice, to be issued soon, will reflect the new payment due date of 30 June 2020.

Why do I need to pay rates?

Strathbogrie Shire Council provides an extensive range of services to the community. This includes waste collection, playgrounds, community facilities, parks and gardens, roads, animal services, planning and building services, and much more – in total, there are more than 130 services which are provided for via rates. If the community doesn't pay rates, these services cannot continue. Council is one of the major employers in the region through the provision of this wide range of services.

I am having trouble paying my rates – what should I do?

The first piece of advice is not to panic – we are here to work with you through this.

Council has a range of ways in which we do this – we have a Hardship Policy and can arrange payment plans to help people reduce their rates debt.

The updated Hardship Policy was adopted at the March 2020 Council meeting and is designed to assist ratepayers in:

- The payment of rates and charges, including the Fire Services Levy;
- Applications to enter into special payment arrangements;
- Applications for financial hardship;

Rates will not generally be waived but can be deferred.

Upon request, an application form will be sent to you and will need to be completed. This will allow you to demonstrate how you are experiencing undue and unusual hardship.

Council does not wish to cause any undue concern to ratepayers who are experiencing financial difficulty – please have no hesitation in talking to us confidentially about your financial situation so we can come to a mutually agreeable solution. We can help you fill out the necessary forms if needed.

Phone: 1800 065 993

Email: info@strathbogrie.vic.gov.au

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I am currently on a payment arrangement agreement but have been impacted by job loss – what can I do?

We understand that people's financial circumstances have significantly been changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For those who are on existing payment plans, we are happy to discuss other arrangements which may better suit their new financial situation.

I am a business and paid my registered premises fee – how do I get a refund?

Council is currently working on processing refunds for fees paid in registering premises. We will provide further information on how you will receive this and we are working on ensuring this reaches you as soon as possible.

Will further financial assistance be available?

Council acknowledges that there will be long-lasting impacts from the Coronavirus restrictions which have been necessary to stop the spread of this virus.

While our first round of rate relief is more immediate, Council is currently preparing its 2020-2021 budget and is aware of pressures being experienced by many people.

As well as preparing a budget Strathbogie Shire, together with other Councils, are also appealing for Federal and State governments to provide financial assistance, which would in turn be passed on to ratepayers.

What is Council doing now the doors are closed?

One of our major priorities has been ensuring staff are safe – many staff are currently working from home. In some circumstances, larger teams have been split in half, rotating between working from home and coming into the office to reduce the overall number of people in the office at one time.

Our teams are focusing on delivering services which are innovative and in line with current Government restrictions. Some examples of this are where youth services and maternity services are looking at running group activities via weblink so that social interaction can occur in an environment that meets social distancing requirements.

All Council departments have been required to be agile and adaptable to their new working arrangements.

For many departments there has been an increased workload as they try to do all they can to support their community and provide services that are valued.

We are all in this together and our work has focused very much on providing support mechanisms and timely communications for community and staff.

We have put on hold recruitment of all but the most critical roles. To respond to community requirements, some current roles have been redeployed to other positions to provide services most in need at this time.

Our customer service staff continue to provide a high level of service, although we have closed our doors to protect members of the public and staff. Customer service staff are available via phone, email and Facebook to answer your queries. Face-to-face appointments with staff are also available via appointment.

Who can I contact for more information?

Our Customer Service Centres are open for telephone and email enquiries. Please phone us on 1800 065 993 or info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au. If you wish to talk to someone in person, please phone us to make an appointment. Customer service staff will ensure your query is dealt with quickly and you are put in touch with the right staff member to deal with your inquiry.

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