

Hutt City Council COVID-19 Response Plan (as at 23 April 2020)

Council has responded to Covid-19 with a range of initiatives to support the Lower Hutt community. The environment is changing rapidly and there is a need to continue to be responsive and provide immediate benefits that reduce financial stress and provide social support to our residents.

There are several aspects to Hutt City Council's COVID-19 Response Plan. These include:

- Rates and Charges
- Support to Businesses
- Focus on Welfare
- Other initiatives

Rates and Charges

1. **Proposed average rates rise** of 7.9% reduced to 3.8% (plus 1% for growth – at risk in current environment) with a one-year emergency budget prepared for consideration by Council on 7 May 2020. A Draft Annual Plan is being prepared to reflect this.
2. A **revised rates postponement policy** is being finalised for publication. The new policy extends to businesses (i.e. non-residential properties) with a capital value of up to \$1.5M. Events like COVID-19 are included in the policy.
3. **New rates payment arrangements** for those experiencing financial hardship. People are encouraged to contact council where they are having difficulty paying their rates. Payment arrangements are offered to people which extend the payment term over a longer period and there are **no rates penalties**.
4. National initiative to **defer the application of recent general property revaluations to rates** to at least the 2021/22 financial year. Requesting government to review this so that suburbs with the greatest increases in rates due to the recent revaluation experience no change in rates%. This would particularly reduce the rates increase for suburbs like Wainuiomata, Naenae, Stokes Valley and Taita who had % changes in property values in excess of 40% due to the recent three-yearly general revaluation. If the current rules apply this would result in residents in these areas paying a higher proportion of the rates bill for the city.
5. Requesting government **extend the existing rates rebates scheme**¹ to a greater number of households (particularly those that can demonstrate loss of income as a result of COVID-19).
6. **No parking charges** effective 23 March and for the duration of the lockdown. Parking charges are reinstated as of midnight Monday 27 April to reflect the move to Alert level 3.
7. **No library fines, extensions re library books** for the duration of the lockdown and into Alert level 3. An online membership service launched.
8. **Online payment of rates** promoted and communications with ratepayers who pay in cash or cheque to move to online. 2643 letters were sent out and we have 226 people to date who have moved to direct debits.
9. Communicating with all stakeholders to encourage **online applications and payments for consent applications**.
10. **Extending due dates for food licensing fees**.

¹ www.govt.nz/browse/housing-and-property/getting-help-with-housing/getting-a-rates-rebate/

Support to Businesses

1. Submission on **major infrastructure projects which are ‘shovel ready’** and can get underway within 6 months. This is a **proposal to the Infrastructure Reference Group** which has been created as a national response to COVID-19. This will act as a key stimulus to the economy and get people working when the alert level is raised. It will also provide certainty to businesses.
2. Keeping our suppliers going - **online payments to suppliers** processed in 5 days (as opposed to 30 days).
3. Working in **partnership with the Hutt Valley Chamber of Commerce and Upper Hutt City Council** to provide support to local businesses including the Love Local campaign, networking opportunities and business advice. **An online resource hub** has been established along with a business Facebook group (currently more than 600 members). Livestreams and webinars are being hosted 4 days a week with local experts providing advice on issues relevant to businesses. Further sector based networking opportunities are being explored and we are encouraging businesses to connect locally with suppliers.
4. Proactive **direct contact with Chamber of Commerce businesses** has been expanded and issues and concerns are being either directly responded to or passed to appropriate experts. Summary information is being shared with WellingtonNZ and with the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment for collation of data on issues affecting businesses regionally and nationally. **Proactive contact has been made with around 600 other businesses** – in particular, supermarkets, pharmacies, accommodation suppliers, medical centres and vets to offer support and gather information.
5. **Providing ongoing information** on our website and Facebook and in some cases sending this directly **to food and alcohol** operators via e-mail.

Focus on Welfare

1. **Grants to Food Banks** and charities supporting food distribution. Funded via a proportion of the Chief Executive’s pay given up to help during COVID-19 and recovery.
2. Redirected \$100K towards a **new Community Resilience Fund** which is operating. This is for organisations, groups and initiatives during COVID-19 and recovery. The fund allows for maximum grants of \$2k to support community-led solutions and wellbeing.
3. **Welfare support** – our staff in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) are leading welfare efforts around regional needs assessment and commissioning established local organisations to meet demand. We are further supporting this by providing the following:
 - A pool of staff working remotely to answer Lower Hutt calls to the national welfare hot-line and carrying out needs assessments by way of survey
 - Staff and vehicles to support local organisations to pick up and deliver food, medicine etc across our city
 - Providing vehicles to the local Runanga (Te Rūnanganui o Te Atiawa ki te Upoko o Te Ika a Maui) for the delivery of food and sanitation packages
 - A pool of staff working remotely to call Lower Hutt-based MSD clients who are aged over 70 and housebound to ensure their welfare needs are being met

Other initiatives

1. **Brought forward investment in IT** to enable online services to be activated so that council business can continue and staff can work from home. This includes the contact centre to working fully online.
2. **Extending Contact centre service** through extended hours and a local service over weekends when needed.
3. **Partial payment of consenting fees.** This allows applicants to pay in smaller instalments so they can maintain cashflow.
4. Apply a **leniency approach to resource consent and building consent enforcement**, whilst maintaining safety
5. **Virtual events, activities and resources for the community** – through Hutt@Heart and the HCC Facebook page. This includes online content from all areas of the business such as health and fitness videos, arts and craft activities, competitions for tamariki and ideas on how to safely connect with and support neighbours.
6. Providing for **public notices for alcohol applications to be published on our website.** **Note that licences cannot be issued for premises** under Alert levels 4 and 3 unless the Ministry of Health etc have reported favourably. This is on hold currently.