

ITEM 6 EASY TO DO BUSINESS

The Easy to do Business Program is an initiative of the NSW Government now being rolled out in NSW. The program seeks to make it easier to set up a business in NSW by reducing complexity and red tape across multiple state departments and local government.

Council at its meeting 25 June 2018 resolved:

- 1 The Easy to do Business report be deferred and return with information incorporating an update on Council's resolution of 20 November 2017 that established a process to form a Red Tape Eradication Task Force.
- 2 The report detail how this policy might be incorporated within the scope of the Task Force.

This report proposes Council join the Easy to do Business Program as part of its commitment to reduce red tape and outlines how the program will complement a co-ordinated approach to red tape eradication.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 Wollongong City Council joins the Easy to do Business Program.
- 2 Council delegates authority to the General Manager to enter into an agreement with Service NSW for Easy to do Business and any necessary documents be authorised for execution.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Kerry Hunt, Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development
Authorised by: Jenny Thompson, Director Community Services - Creative and Innovative City (Acting)

ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments for this report.

BACKGROUND

The Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA) has around 13,000 businesses, of which, approximately 94% are classified as small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

Wollongong Council joined the Small Business Friendly Council's Program in August 2015. The program which includes several initiatives, of which Easy to do Business is a part, is an example of an ongoing commitment to eradicate red tape within local government across NSW.

On 13 November 2017, the NSW Small Business Commissioner wrote to the Lord Mayor and General Manager seeking Council's agreement to join the Easy to do Business Program ("the Program"). The Program is part of the Small Business Friendly Councils' Program, building on the work already undertaken to create a one-stop shop for small business customers and streamlining the way these businesses transact with local, state and federal government.

The purpose of the Program is to:

- Help business owners open and grow a café, small bar or restaurant by providing a single online digital solution and personalised support.
- Make it easier to set up a business in NSW.

A recent review by the Small Business Commissioner identified that those wanting to start up a new café/restaurant/small bar would have to deal with up to 13 agencies, 75 regulations, 30 phone numbers and 48 forms – taking up to 18 months. The aim of this Program is to reduce this down to three months through a single point of entry digital platform via Service NSW and reduce complexity and red tape through providing a one-stop, streamlined process. Through the program, these times have been reduced to 90 days or less with customers only filling in only one online form or making one phone call.

This Program has been piloted across selected NSW councils for the last 12 months and is now being progressively rolled out across the state. As at August 2018, 89 councils across NSW had joined the program.

Red Tape Eradication Task Force

On 20 November 2017, Council resolved on the motion of Cr T Brown:

- 1 A consultation process be developed to engage community stakeholders interested in participating in a Council red-tape eradication taskforce.
- 2 The matter be the subject of a briefing in early 2018 which will outline the form and terms of reference of the taskforce.

The Easy to do Business Program will form part of Wollongong Council's Red Tape Eradication Task Force. The Program will assist in reducing red tape across various approval agencies, including NSW Government and Wollongong Council. It will allow for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to commence trading in faster timeframes and support local job creation.

There are a number of benefits to Council participating in the Program, including productivity gains through time savings and higher quality planning applications, provision of a better customer service experience; red tape reduction and an improved perception of Council being business friendly amongst the community and key business stakeholders. This report is seeking Council's endorsement to join the Easy to do Business Program.

In the initial phase, the Program will help business owners looking to open a new café, small bar or restaurant by providing access to a single online digital solution and personalised support. In 2018-19, the program will be expanded to include the housing construction sector.

Under the Program, Service NSW provides a digital platform and upfront information regarding what is required by a potential new business owner from all the relevant approval authorities across all levels of Government. A single digital form replaces the 48 existing forms across various Government agencies, including 11 from Council: Development Application; Construction Certificate; Application Outdoor Dining; Temporary Road Occupancy; Occupancy Certificate; Hoarding Application; Notice of Commencement of Work; Political Donations and Gifts; Disclosure Statement; Notice of Development Application; Regulated Health Premises; and Registration Application for Mobile Vending). All information provided will be specific to the Wollongong LGA

Upon registering and activating a 'MyServiceNSW' account, customers use a comprehensive online tool to commence their application, allowing them to enter all the required information just once within a single platform. A personal business concierge service (staffed by Service NSW) via a single phone number is also provided to support customers throughout the entire process.

The business concierge service reviews and checks all of the customer's information against a checklist, ready for the customer to print and sign. The customer then lodges the completed forms with Council as per regular processes.

The Program does not impact upon Council processes or systems. The platform is accessed online and managed by Service NSW and does not need to talk with Council's system. Any Council queries at that point after lodgement are raised directly with the customer and the final decision will be relayed to the customer and the Easy to do Business team (via email) for tracking.

Council will remain the approval authority for the relevant applications, licences and other approvals such as development approvals, local approvals policy, food premises licensing and inspections and footpath dining approvals. There is no change to actual lodgement processes and customers still directly provide Council with the relevant forms.

Through participation in the Program, Council will further its commitment as 'business friendly' and responsive to the needs of small business and the community, which is likely to be well received by the local business community including the Illawarra Business Chamber.

Getting local SMEs out trading in a faster time frame, due to reduced red tape, across various approval agencies, enables more jobs in the LGA. In the 12 months to December 2017, Council had approximately 1,833 enquiries regarding small business that came through the customer service desk – representing an average of over seven enquiries per working day.

Next Steps

The Service NSW (One-stop Access to Government Service) Act 2013 No 39 ('the Act') requires a resolution of Council to allow Service NSW to support Council's customer service functions.

Specifically, in accordance with s 7.5 of the Act, Service NSW requires Council approve the delegation of the relevant customer service functions related to the administration of the Easy to do Business Program to the Chief Executive Officer, Service NSW. The relevant customer service functions, defined in Section 5 of the Act, would be the "provision of information or advice about Government services or State legislation or any other matter".

Following Council's approval to join, the General Manager of Council (or delegate) would need to enter into a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Service NSW.

There are no specific reporting requirements from Council to Service NSW.

Following the signing of the MOU, an initial 'gap analysis' will need to be undertaken in conjunction with Service NSW, so that Council can become operationally ready. Once complete, the relevant forms/information will be uploaded to the platform and the system will go live.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that the Easy to do Business Program forms part of Wollongong Council's Red Tape Eradication Task Force. The Program will assist in reducing red tape across various approval agencies, including NSW Government and Wollongong Council. It will allow for SMEs to commence trading in faster timeframes and support local job creation.

There are a number of benefits to Council participating in the program, including productivity gains through time savings and higher quality planning applications, provision of a better customer service experience; red tape reduction and an improved perception of Council being business friendly amongst the community and key business stakeholders.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Service NSW has consulted with both the Development Assessment and Certification Division and the Economic Development team.

Service NSW presented an overview of the Program to the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Joint Organisation.

Council recently adopted the Community Engagement Strategy which provides the platform for establishment of the overarching taskforce approach to the red tape reduction initiative. Officers will be initiating a virtual taskforce, using the new Register of Interest process to seek feedback directly from the community on their perception of onerous rules and regulations. At the time of writing this report, the Register of Interest had opened, with 15 residents registering interest in Red Tape Reduction.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2028 goal 2 “*We have an innovative and sustainable economy*”. It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2021	Operational Plan 2018-19
Strategy	3 Year Action	Operational Plan Actions
2.1.3 Cross sector initiatives are coordinated and implemented to increase and attract business investment, supporting small businesses and encouraging jobs growth	2.1.3.1 Support regional activities and partnerships that promote business investment and jobs growth	Implement the Economic Development Strategy 2013-23

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial costs to Wollongong City Council from participating in the Program.

CONCLUSION

This report is seeking for a Council resolution that agrees to enter into a partnership with Service NSW to deliver the Easy to do Business Program. It will provide a number of benefits to Council, including productivity gains through time savings and higher quality planning applications, provision of a better customer experience, red tape reduction and an improved perception of Council being business friendly amongst the community and key business stakeholders.