



Hardship Policy

COVID-19 Addendum

This Hardship Policy COVID-19 Addendum is effective 12 August 2020 to 31 May 2021 (or as revised by Baw Baw Shire Council) and is an addendum to Council's Hardship Policy (effective 26 June 2019).

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the adopted Hardship Policy 2019/20 and the Community and Business Support Package adopted by Council 22 April 2020.

Background

Council recognises members of our community have been impacted in some way by the COVID-19 crisis, and the range of services and resources that Baw Baw Shire Council oversees gives opportunity for Council to provide relief and support.

Recognising this, Council has a COVID-19 Community and Business Support Package (adopted by Council 22 April 2020), which provides financial support through a range of financial support measures to Baw Baw residents and businesses. This Hardship Policy COVID-19 Addendum gives effect to the Community and Business Support Package in respect of rates, interest and charges.

Municipal rates, fees and charges are the primary source of revenue for Council to ensure the ongoing delivery of a range of important services and infrastructure to the local community. In times of emergency, such as with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council recognises the significant hardship that can be experienced by the members of the community and the local business sector. Managing financial hardship is a shared responsibility and Council has a part to play whilst ensuring that it maintains the necessary cashflow to deliver critical services to the community during this time.

Scope

This Hardship Policy COVID-19 Addendum applies to all ratepayers in financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency and enables them to apply to defer payment of rates.



Hardship Policy

COVID-19 Addendum

Definitions

Financial Hardship

Under this policy addendum, the ratepayer must be experiencing and be able to demonstrate a significant change in financial circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency which will affect the ratepayer's ability to pay rates when due.

This may include but not limited to unemployment, illness, decrease or loss of income or any other matter considered by the Council at its discretion.

Rates deferral

A deferral suspends payment for a period of time and schedules payment via a negotiated and agreed payment plan. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not waive payments.

Policy

This Hardship Policy COVID-19 Addendum gives effect to the Community and Business Support Package adopted by Council 22 April 2020 in respect of rates, interest and charges.

Policy provisions:

1. The following applies to all ratepayers regardless of hardship or tenure:
 - a. without application the due date for the current fourth quarter rates installment payment was extended from 31 May 2020 to 30 June 2020 for all ratepayers. Interest for late payment of rates will be calculated from 30 June 2020 and not back dated to 31 May 2020 for all ratepayers.

2. Under this Hardship Policy COVID-19 Addendum, eligible ratepayers experiencing financial hardship can apply to defer rates and enter a payment plan with Council for the 2020/21 year without incurring interest.
 - a. eligible ratepayers must enter into a payment arrangement with Council comprising an agreed schedule of payments including amount and frequency.
 - b. the eligible ratepayer must have previously demonstrated a genuine effort to meet obligations and has a sound record of payment.
 - c. payment arrangements must clear the debt by 31 May 2021 (the regular payment date of the fourth instalment).



Hardship Policy

COVID-19 Addendum

- d. more than one payment default during the payment plan period will result in cancellation of the arrangement and initiation of recovery action for unpaid debt and interest charges.
- e. it is the applicant's responsibility to communicate with Council in a timely manner should further hardship barriers to payment be experienced and an extension past 31 May 2021 be required.
- f. penalty interest will be charged on outstanding balances, but a waiver of interest charges (partial or whole) may be approved or offered as an incentive for earlier settlement of the debt.
- g. An application can be made using the Application for Hardship Assistance form by email to bawbaw@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au , including the details of the circumstances preventing that person or business from meeting their financial obligations to Council.
- h. The Council will consider an application for financial hardship relief confidentially and objectively based on the information provided by the person or business in the application and will advise of its decision in writing within 15 business days of receiving the application and all supporting information.

Contact us

For more information please contact Council's Finance team on 5624 2411 or by email at bawbaw@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au.