A message from the
Mayor David Wortmann
Thursday April 9 2020

Our Towong Shire communities are facing unprecedented times with the bushfires in January and now with the Coronavirus pandemic.

We know that these are difficult times for everyone and the impact on the social and economic wellbeing of our communities will be significant.

Council has been looking at what we can do to help through rate relief, support for local businesses and introducing a COVID-19 Hardship Policy.

The measures will help ease the pressure for those facing financial hardship with greater flexibility through payment plans or deferment, without interest being applied. We encourage people to contact our Property and Rates team to find an option that works for them.

Providing rate relief is front of mind for Council and I am pleased to advise that we have secured funding from Bushfire Recovery Victoria to assist with providing rate relief.

There are many complexities with how the funds are allocated which Council is working through.

The principle we will be working towards is assisting those who have been impacted the most. Further information will be provided in the weeks ahead.

We are currently preparing our 2020/21 Budget and this is never an easy task, with a large municipality and a very small rate base.

Fortunately, Council has approval to apply some of the funds so that there is no rate increase for next year.

We know that the pandemic is creating new challenges for Towong Shire businesses that were already hurting from the bushfires.

To support our businesses, Council has waived business registration fees for food, prescribed accommodation and Health Act premises for 2020. You must still be registered but there will be no fee payable.
We urge every business to check what financial help they may be eligible for, including the Victorian Government’s $10,000 Bushfire Grant for Businesses and the new $10,000 grant for businesses impacted by Coronavirus. If you need any assistance in understanding what support is available or making an application please contact our Bushfire Recovery team on 1800 518 222.

At Tuesday’s meeting Council adopted its COVID-19 Hardship Policy.

This policy recognises that some of our residents will have experienced a loss of income and therefore will be struggling to pay their rates.

The measures will help ease the pressure for those facing financial hardship with greater flexibility through payment plans or deferment, without interest being applied.

We encourage people to contact our Property and Rates team to find an option that works for them (call 02 6071 5100).

Finally, I want to thank everyone for responding so well to the Government restrictions that are now in place.

Particularly a big thank you to all the essential workers who continue to go to work for us.

I understand it is a really hard time for everyone, but please remember that we are in this together.

I want to offer some reassurance that it is normal to feel overwhelmed, anxious and scared following a traumatic experience. This can happen for people that are directly or indirectly impacted.

If you find that these feelings are impacting you, please reach out and speak to someone. Contact details are available at www.towong.vic.gov.au/Coronavirus.

Please continue to stay home this Easter weekend. Use this as a chance to slow down and spend some quality time with those around you and doing things you enjoy.

Wishing you all a happy and safe Easter.

Sincerely,
Towong Shire Council Mayor David Wortmann