

Augusta Margaret River Local Emergency Management Committee

Attachments

For the meeting to be held
Tuesday, 11 August 2020
Margaret River Council Chambers
41 Wallcliffe Road, Margaret River
Commencing at 4.30pm



Your Ref:
Our Ref: 20/103352 : D12731
Enquiries: Stephanie Underwood
Telephone: 08 9395 9888

SEMC UPDATE

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Western Australia (WA) and the emergency management (EM) sector has worked well together to deliver a coordinated response for the WA community. Thank you for the active and valuable role you have played.

Further to my letter dated 1 May 2020 outlining changes to State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) business due to COVID-19, I wish to provide you with an update.

As your organisation's capacity allows I strongly encourage emergency management meetings and business as usual activities, such as risk workshops, consultation and emergency management arrangement development, to resume.

The Emergency Preparedness Report Steering Committee have determined not to release the Annual and Preparedness Report Capability Survey for 2020. This decision reflects the significant impact that COVID-19 had, and continues to have, on the EM sector across WA. It is expected that the 2021 survey will go ahead in April next year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron F Edwards'.

Dr Ron F Edwards
CHAIRPERSON
STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

15 June 2020



Our Ref: D14203; 20/122136

Dear Local Government Chief Executive Officer

DISTRICT IMPACT STATEMENT COVID-19 RECOVERY

I would like to thank you for your ongoing contribution towards the State's recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The information from local governments shared through the recent survey has been analysed by DFES State Recovery and documented in the attached District Impact Statement.

The summary of the District Impact Statements was provided to Commissioner Sharyn O'Neill, State Recovery Controller for consideration to inform development of the State Impact Statement and the State Recovery Plan. It is anticipated that the State Recovery Plan will be released publicly towards the end of July 2020 on WA.gov.au.

Based on information provided, key themes that emerged from the surveys undertaken included:

1. **Mental Health:** The majority of local governments reported impacts to the mental health of community members and their staff due to isolation, loneliness, anxiety, loss of social gatherings, changes to employment, workload and uncertainty. In many cases this was anecdotal, however local governments are increasingly undertaking community engagement to gain an understanding of the impacts to their communities.
2. **Homelessness:** Similar to mental health, a large number of local governments identified an increase in homelessness rates, particularly within the Metropolitan area and large regional centres, with a range of contributing factors identified. These include loss of employment and subsequent income, lack of rentals/housing, individuals or families seeking to get away from unsafe family situations, backpackers and seasonal workers unable to afford accommodation and Aboriginal communities moving to and from lands.
3. **Tourism:** Tourism was generally identified by local governments across all regions as the sector that has been hardest hit with major impacts to tourism operators, accommodation, hospitality and retail operators.
4. **Financial viability of local governments:** Whilst all local governments recognised impacts to individuals and businesses, a clear theme to emerge is the financial impact to local government. Several local governments were affected by natural disasters during 2019/20 and as a result there has been a compounding impact on their finances. This is expected to continue into the next financial year as a result of reduced revenue from COVID-19 support measures. Many local governments raised concerns around the ability to maintain current service delivery levels and the ability to meet increasing expectation of communities. This is particularly evident if a significant proportion of ratepayers are unable to pay their rates notices, leading to a further reduction in revenue.

5. **Employment and Recruitment:** A major concern for local governments in regional areas is ongoing employment and recruitment. For many regional local governments, the difficulty in attracting and retaining staff has been exacerbated by isolation and the regional restriction measures. These measures led to some staff vacating positions to return home to families. With an ongoing concern of a second wave of the virus, there is a perception that some workers will be reluctant to relocate in case they are forced into lockdown once again.
6. **Family Domestic Violence:** The reported occurrences of Family Domestic Violence (FDV) varied across the State with some local governments reporting no change to figures. However, several local governments reported an increase to FDV statistics as reported by WA Police and via service agencies receiving increased referrals. Some local governments have attributed the increase in homelessness figures to individuals and families escaping violent situations in some instances. Similar to mental health increases, some local governments have concerns over the availability of support services to cope with increased FDV cases.
7. **Global:** Whilst some sectors such as mining and agriculture have experienced only minimal impacts to date, potential embargoes, tariffs and trade restrictions by China was of concern to some local governments. Similarly, the export sector has experienced some challenges which were likely to continue as pandemic pressures impact on global relationships.

On a positive note, it was encouraging to see local government initiatives being implemented to support their communities and lessen the impact as a result of COVID-19. All local governments reported providing support to members of their community through a range of stimulus and assistance mechanisms. Commonly implemented initiatives include the implementation of hardship policies, rates, fee and rent relief and the development of community and business support grants and programs. The majority of local governments highlighted the importance of increasing social connectivity activities including sports, arts and culture and community groups to ensure the social fabric of communities is maintained.

Moving forward, local government will continue to play an important role in recovery, which was recently highlighted in correspondence from the State Recovery Controller. Should you have any concerns or questions in relation to COVID-19 recovery planning, I encourage you to contact your DFES District Emergency Management Advisor.

We will be reaching out to you each quarter to capture emerging issues and key actions taken at the local level. This information will again be used to inform ongoing recovery planning.

Finally, I would like to thank all local government who supported the survey and sharing their experiences with us. Your input has been greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely



GRAHAM SWIFT
STATE RECOVERY COORDINATOR

20 July 2020



FOR A SAFER STATE

**SOUTH WEST DISTRICT IMPACT STATEMENT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT COVID-19 RECOVERY
JUNE 2020**

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Introduction

The development of an impact statement is a requirement under the Western Australian Emergency Management framework.

Its purpose is to:

- Identify the immediate impact of the hazard as well as on an ongoing basis;
- Provide accurate and consistent information to support recovery planning and decision making; and
- Inform scenario planning and the development of the State Recovery Plan and sub-plans.

Key elements of the impact statements are that they:

- Are iterative and updated at regular intervals to enable flexibility with recovery planning
- Include quantitative and qualitative information
- Include details on the current known impact as well as identifying emerging concerns and potential future impacts
- Are evidence based¹.

At the request of the State Recovery Controller, DFES State Recovery were tasked with the collection and collation of local government recovery impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A survey was developed to collect impacts, initiatives, risks, opportunities and emerging issues as they relate to recovery from both a local government and community perspective.

Information from the survey has been collated to form 8 District Impact Statements² with an overview of the impacts and issues relevant to each District.

¹ Due to the varying levels of quantitative data available to local government, some information provided in this report is anecdotal

² North, East, South and Central Metropolitan have been combined to form 1 Metropolitan District Impact Statement

South West District Profile³

The South West region covers an area of approximately 23,900 km². It is the most populous and fastest growing area outside of the Perth and Peel regions, with 12 local governments and a combined population of approximately 180,000.

The South West is a popular tourist destination and is known for its beautiful coastline and towering forests. The region's diverse range of industries includes agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, retail and construction, along with the export of alumina, coal, titanium dioxide, lithium, tantalum and silicon. Notably, the region is home to the Margaret River wine region which attracts tourists from around the world.

Natural and man-made hazard events occur throughout the region. The highest priority hazards, as identified by the South West District Emergency Management Committee are: animal and plant biosecurity, bushfire, electricity supply disruption, flood and storm.

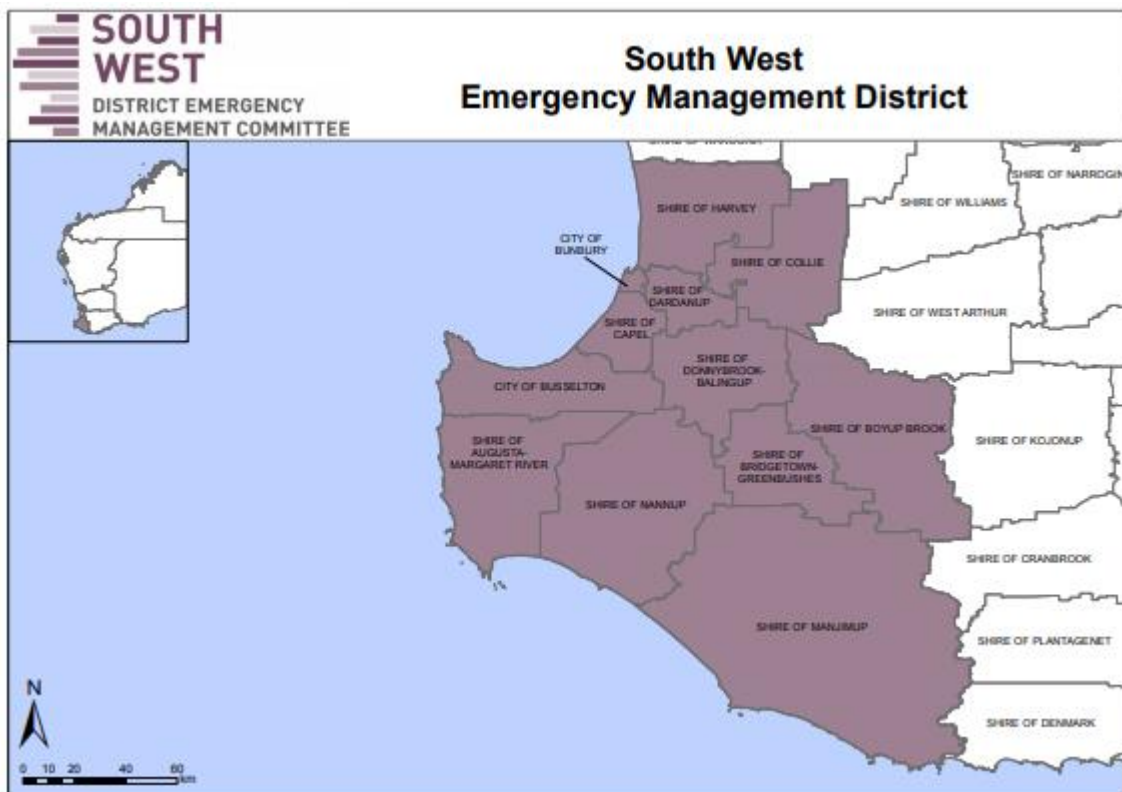


Figure 1. South West EM District map

³ South West Emergency Management District Risk Assessment Report 'Highlighting potential disaster impacts' (2017) <https://semc.wa.gov.au/state-risk-project/district/south-west/Documents/SouthWestRiskReport.pdf>

Summary

Of the 12 local governments within the South West, 9 provided a response to the survey.

Health and social impacts within the region primarily occurred across the issues of mental health, reported increases in domestic violence and impacts to homelessness and rough sleeping due to a lack of rentals in the market. Homelessness was also exacerbated by seasonal workers such as backpackers unable to leave regions and having difficulty finding accommodation due to a lack of finances.

The issue of itinerant works was also recognised as an emerging issue as orchards move into picking season in September and a potential for a lack of seasonal workers and backpackers to support this process which could have significant impacts on the industry.

Although industry across the South West is diverse in nature, the most predominant impact was to the tourism sector with all local governments identifying that businesses within the tourism industry were hardest hit including accommodation, hospitality and arts and culture providers.

Known Impacts

Health

- COVID-19 has been a trigger to pre-existing and newly diagnosed mental health illness
- At-risk and vulnerable groups such as those with undiagnosed/untreated illnesses are having to wait longer
- Mental and physical health impacts, particularly in relation to at-risk individuals
- Increased anxiety levels across parts of the community, including local government workforce
- Homelessness and the aged/infirm became more vulnerable as people isolated themselves
- Decreased admissions and attendance at local hospital
- Increased levels of isolation impacting on mental health and wellbeing
- Health services have been heavily impacted, have extensive workloads and clients and have increased difficulty in accessing the service providers
- Concerns and queries from food businesses regarding health implications and COVID-19 safety plans
- Concern and anxiety increased due to the lockdown of aged care facilities
- Implementation of telehealth due to closed or reduced services

Social

- Reported increases in domestic violence
- Decrease in reported crime and assaults (non-family related)
- Absence of arts, culture and sporting/community groups
- Increase in social isolation and lack of connectedness
- Impacts to food and accommodation security
- Lack of continuity of support services and agencies – particularly for at-risk individuals
- Increase in homelessness numbers
- Reduction in volunteer numbers due to feelings of vulnerability
- Lack of IT set up for some families and poor internet services in rural areas making digital/online connection difficult
- Increased alcohol purchasing recorded
- Increased online gambling reported
- Challenges to families with FIFO workers due to longer swings placing additional pressure on remaining family members
- Clients not able to access rentals in district Aboriginal community
- Difficulty reaching out to multicultural community and providing adequate communications
- Lack of available rentals in town placing several families at risk of homelessness
- Backpacker community working on local orchards were unable to leave due to border closures and treated unfairly by some residents
- Cancellation of events and loss of jobs has impacted on the social fabric of the community
- High impact on International travellers who have become stranded
- High level of casual and seasonal workers impacted across the community

Economic and Infrastructure

- Loss of stock for cafes/restaurants/bars and pubs
- Impacts to delivery businesses/couriers due to delays
- Requirement for employee hours to be reduced or stood down due to closure and/or restructure of business – including the Shire
- Slow-down of major infrastructure projects and capital works projects
- Significant impact to small business
- Local governments significantly affected
- Cancellation of driving tests means that future job opportunities may be limited for youth in the region. This issue is a high priority for Department of Transport and they are providing regular updates to their Minister
- Closure of restaurants and cafes, some permanent
- Minor and major projects being brought online to support local tradespeople and businesses
- High rate of job loss – South West reported over 5000 long term job losses
- Extensive causal job losses within the hospitality and tourism sector
- A significant number of businesses experienced financial struggles due to no or reduced operating hours⁴

Industry

- Tourism industry came to a standstill
- Agriculture products and cessation of export opportunities for perishable products was a problem
- Accommodation providers lost almost 100% of business overnight
- Arts and Culture and Sport and Recreation industry severely impacted with reinstatement becoming problematic in some cases as it is deemed too risky by organisers
- Significant impact to the childcare and early education industry with an initial drop to approx. 10% patronage in some areas
- Local impacts to orchardists in securing a workforce through the picking seasons
- Community services sector came to a halt
- Impact to retail industry
- Export sector have experienced some challenges which will likely continue as pandemic pressures impact on global friction

Regions

- All local governments reported that the greatest impact across the region was on tourism, including accommodation and hospitality sectors

⁴ Shire of Capel COVID-19 Community Recovery and Support Survey – Of the 139 businesses that participated, 78 experienced financial struggles. Further data from the Shire of Capel survey is available on request

Government, business, industry and community action to date

- 0% increase in rates and fees
- Waiving of fees and some approvals
- Hardship policies
- Community support initiatives
- Business support initiatives
- Customer care lines
- Bringing forward of works identified in capital works plans to stimulate local economy
- Focus on local contractors to provide services for capital works projects
- Shop local campaigns
- Partnership between Shire, Chamber of Commerce and local media to support local businesses
- Community grants
- Dedicated websites and social media to support community and business
- Small business grants
- Arts program grants
- Social and community support programs for vulnerable people
- Individualised education and support for businesses by economic development and environmental health officers
- Expedited payments to creditors
- Community and business surveys
- Economic development recovery plan
- Economic development recovery communications action plan
- Tourism campaigns
- Support to sporting groups
- Online fitness programs
- Assistance to food businesses on COVID-19 safety plans and requirements
- Online retail
- Featuring local artists for upcoming events
- Events held over longer periods where appropriate e.g. Nannup Flower and Garden Festival held over 5 weeks instead of 4 days
- Community activity wellbeing program
- Backpackers – work with local accommodation providers to assist backpacker workforce availability, stability and pandemic information/education
- Vulnerable communities database developed
- Hotline
- Backpacker support program
- Direct phone contacts
- Business continuity and staff wellbeing tracking
- Recovery Coordinator and response team identified

Key Risks and opportunities

Risks

- Retention of staff – particularly with JobKeeper not being available to local government
- Ongoing closure of small business
- Diverse localities and with each community comes a different level of community connectedness and resilience. There is a risk of a lack of community connectivity in some areas where individuals and groups do not have access to the support services and agencies that they require
- Financial risks that include consuming reserve funds, taking on additional debt, revenue not returning to pre COVID -19 levels and grant funding being made unavailable for capital e.g. Lotterywest
- Childcare centres potentially going out of business
- Community groups folding as a result of loss of members and financial unsustainability
- The provision of timely and accurate information to community groups delivered by the State – significant confusion on COVID-19 Business Safety Plans which can lead to risks with information not being understood
- Local and District Emergency Management Arrangements were silent on Pandemics, consequently Local Recovery Plans were not formally activated and stakeholders not willing or able to support the recovery process
- September cut-off of JobKeeper funding – resulting impacts are unknown but could be significant
- A major influx of tourists post the lifting of restrictions can create additional pressure with many tourist resources still closed or limited in service
- Ongoing mental health impact and services to assist needed
- Ongoing and increasing housing stress
- Long term job prospects depleted due to business closures
- Balancing food and accommodation numbers, pandemic regulations and sustainability could see a number of businesses shrink their service model minimising staff requirements
- High risk of a significant shortage of seasonal workers in the South West come the onset of pruning and picking season in September
- The 'invisible' experiencing hardship are hard to identify and may fall through the gaps
- The management of events post COVID-19 environment will be challenging and have a significant effect on the economy in regard to both direct and indirect spends. Regulations that are too onerous, particularly on volunteer run events may result in events folding

Opportunities

- Promotion of local tourism
- Bringing forward of major projects to stimulate the economy
- Adopt staffing policies and procedures developed in response to COVID-19 as part of a 'new normal' for business operations and as part of a suite of emergency management policies and procedures in order to ensure business continuity
- New partnerships with support services and agencies to support individuals and groups in areas where there is a risk of a lack of community connectivity
- Continuation of online and virtual communications
- Seek to have one agency responsible for data collection – have had multiple requests from multiple agencies
- Red tape reduction
- Collective local government initiatives such as online webinars and service delivery of shared community services
- Targeting of other industries to diversify the employment base – is there an overreliance on tourism/hospitality?
- Business investment for clean industries to establish within the District
- Coordination of local government Recovery Coordinator network across all LGs in the South West was undertaken well and the sharing of ideas enabled a shared action response around issues such as backpackers and business support
- Unique opportunity to encourage people to experience, enjoy and celebrate the incredible travel and experiential opportunities in their own backyard
- Federal stimulus funds will inject capital projects funding into towns Selection of projects should be focused on those that will directly benefit the local economy through local workforce, contractors and suppliers
- State stimulus funds will encourage local investment

Enablers and Barriers to the opportunities above include:

- Funding and available tradespeople if bringing projects forward
- Funding to support community initiatives developed in recovery
- Digital capacity is both an enabler and a barrier
- The formalisation of alliances between local governments in recovery
- Red tape to new initiatives
- Funding for project and business development
- Broad industry led recovery strategies e.g. first tourism support grant was structured in a way that only about a quarter of the sector would be eligible for
- Strategies that build foundation growth and development not just propping up
- Overzealous and costly risk management measures for events and grant funded projects will result in many volunteer run activities ceasing
- Recovery measures must recognise that one size does not fit all and needs in regional, remote and metro area are all different
- Visa management for itinerant workforce

Stakeholder Consultation

- WA Country Health Service – South West
- WA Police
- Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- Department of Communities
- St John Ambulance
- Department of Human services
- Department of Corrective Services
- Prisons
- TELSTRA
- State Emergency Management Committee
- Red Cross
- Community service organisations
- Business
- Community groups
- Regional local government meetings
- Local Emergency Management Committee
- Operational Area Support Group
- Incident Management Team
- Internal consultation
- Residents
- Establishment of economic and human and social subgroups
- Phone surveys
- Social media
- Recovery and support surveys – businesses, community groups and sporting clubs and individuals
- Business Initiative Group
- Tourism Advisory Committee
- Visitor Centre
- LG Professionals Catalyse survey
- Health and community organisation consultation
- Vulnerable resident contact program
- Direct phone calls
- Support and Emergency crisis agencies
- Western Australian Local Government Association
- South West Development Commission
- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
- South West Recovery Coordinator Groups

Other relevant contextual information

- On 25 May 2020, A significant storm event caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Mangga, impacted the South West region.
- A district-level informal recovery group has been established to promote information sharing and situational awareness. This includes 12 Local Recovery Coordinators from the 12 local governments and Agency representatives
- COVID-19 has caused a significant impact on the South West local government's internal business continuity and emergency management capacity. A reduced ability to conduct emergency management business such as the Local and District Emergency Management Committee meetings, workshops, and exercises has been observed across the South West Emergency Management District.
- Some local governments activated the local recovery arrangements, including requesting state agency participation. Agencies directly engaged in COVID-19 response are unable to attend multiple local level recovery meetings. A district-level recovery coordination arrangement could be a solution to minimise the duplication and burden on state agency participation.
- Intrastate and international travel restrictions have caused significant interest in visiting South West region, resulting in significant increase in vehicle traffic and people to the tourist hot spots.
- The recent winter storm events and COVID-19 has generated substantial interest in progressing welfare arrangements for homeless people. Department of Communities in conjunction with local governments and various agencies is currently progressing welfare arrangements for homeless people.
- A key highlight of the South West region is the improved cooperation and collaboration between the Local, District, State, and Commonwealth agencies during the ongoing COVID-19 Operations Area Support Group meetings. The leadership provided by the SW Police Superintendent, DFES SW & LSW Superintendents and WA Country Health Regional Director in managing the COVID-19 OASG stakeholders has been an enduring theme for reassuring the regional and local government emergency management stakeholders.

Concerns / emerging issues / potential impacts

- Potential for a second wave causing another community shutdown and testing community resilience
 - JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments ending
 - Police have reported the opening of borders will assist organised crime operations and increase road trauma
 - Emergency services will still have to respond to other incidents which may cause additional pressures
 - COVID-phobia may impact on a return to normal socialisation which could impact hospitality, events, live music, arts events and sporting crowds
 - Free childcare set to end soon leaving families struggling to pay and/or unable to take time off due to depletion of existing leave entitlements
 - A delay in the provision of guidance has created uncertainty and potential delays in re-opening of facilities
 - Lack of services due to the permanent closure of businesses i.e. no restaurants in town
 - Long term unemployment
 - Businesses unable to provide service without added support in place
 - If itinerant workforce is not secured, impact could be crippling for the South West agricultural and primary industries sector
 - Rate freeze could delay some capital projects and impact on service delivery
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Contact

Suzanne Blyth, Manager Recovery Emergency Management, Department of Fire and Emergency Services

Vik Cheema, District Emergency Management Advisor South West, Department of Fire and Emergency Services

Local Emergency Management Committee Meeting

11 August 2020

Hypothetical Desktop Exercise – Water Corporation

Scenario

It is the peak of tourism season in the Shire with all tourist accommodation reporting that they are operating at or near peak capacity. The region is experiencing its regular annual influx of tourists as families begin the migration south for the 1st term school holidays.

A severe electrical storm passes over the region late on **Thursday 1st April 2021 (evening)**, resulting in significant damage to the power infrastructure that feeds the Ten Mile Brook Dam pumping site. In addition to this numerous Level 2 fires to the north of Bunbury have closed the Forrest Highway and Albany Highway, severely limiting access to the region.

Whilst power has been restored to the majority of the Shire, damage to the Water Corporation infrastructure at the dam has necessitated the mobilisation of an external generator and parts to the site from Perth. Until the generator and parts arrive, Water Corporation can only guarantee the supply that currently resides in the main town tank.

Water Corporation advises that they have received notification that, due to the road closures and Public Holiday, it is unlikely the generator and parts can be onsite at the facility until **Tuesday 6th April 2021**, following the Easter Monday Public Holiday, with restoration of service to take approx. 5 hours.

Considering the above, Water Corporation have advised that the current supply will only last until **Saturday 3rd April 2021**.

In light of the above, and the ongoing fires to the north of Bunbury, DFES has imposed a Total Fire Ban for the region extending until **Friday 16th April 2021**. The Shire is currently in the Prohibited Burning Period and current COVID restrictions (Phase 4) are still in place.

Response

1. How would the loss of scheme water access affect your organisation?

2. What capacity does your organisation have to continue to provide its service?

3. At what point, if at all, would your organisation have to cease delivering its service?

4. What reliance does your organisation have on the Water Corporation to provide sewage and effluent services?

5. What ability does your organisation have to, if required, utilise out-of-Shire facilities to provide an alternative temporary method of delivery?

6. What does the limitation or exhaustion have on your organisation's ability to comply with the current elevated hygiene requirements to address COVID implications?

7. Does your organisation have access to any local emergency water supply equipment/assets that can assist other organisations during a water shortage?