Item 12.8

Notices of Motion

Extending the Fee Waiver for Community Spaces in the City of Sydney

By Councillor Ellsmore

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

(i) Council has a wide range of community venues for hire including town halls, community centres, library meeting rooms and other spaces;

(ii) Council provides free and discounted hire of its community spaces to not-for-profits, and a range of other groups;

(iii) introduced at the request of resident groups, since 2022 Council has waived the hire fee, and also offered free coverage by Council's public liability insurance, for eligible 'local community groups' hiring community venues;

(iv) the fee waiver has supported the community to reconnect post-Covid, helped re-activate community spaces, and supported the formation of new local community groups. In addition to resident groups, examples of groups who have accessed the free hire include anti-poverty groups, anti-racism groups, meditation groups, social clubs, sustainable crafts groups, and more;

(v) this small but important measure helps the City deliver on its social sustainability policy and goals. The percentage of City Spaces facilities and venues at community or reduced rates or through a fee waiver is one of the measures that Council uses to track progress towards Council's goal that "Everyone has equitable and affordable access to community and cultural facilities and programs, supporting social connection and wellbeing";

(vi) in the most recent budget, Council committed to maintain the fee waiver until 2029;

(vii) Council's online booking forms have been updated to make it easy to apply for the fee waiver. However, there have been some persistent confusion about which groups meet the definition of a 'local community group' and are eligible for the waiver. Examples of groups where there has been uncertainty include but are not limited to:

(a) self-help groups such as mental health support groups;

(b) social clubs run by volunteers which charge a small fee to cover costs (for example to pay for equipment like yoga mats), but don't make a profit;

(c) art groups run by volunteers who charge a small fee to cover the cost of engaging a life model for a class, but otherwise charge no fees;

(d) union members who work in the city looking for a free space to hold a members' meeting;

(e) groups who can be defined as a sporting club, for example a group of volunteers which gets together to practice dancing, or a LARPing (live action role play) group;

(f) parents who live in the city looking to meet with other parents to run activities for their children; and

(g) groups of artists, performers and musicians who live or frequently perform or exhibit in the City looking to hire free space for rehearsals or galleries;

(B) Council further note:

(i) loneliness and social isolation has been identified as a growing issue in the Council's draft Community Strategic Plan, shortly to be put on exhibition;

(ii) the cost to waive fees for those groups which would otherwise have been eligible for a discounted community fee rate is modest;

(iii) Council's community spaces have capacity to increase bookings; and

(iv) Council recently agreed to permanently waive footpath dining fees for businesses; and

(C) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

(i) investigate permanently waiving hiring and insurance fees for community spaces for Council's consideration as part of the 2025/26 and forward budgets;

(ii) undertake a review of the current definition of who has access to the free hire, including groups who have not been considered eligible under the current definition;

(iii) bring a report to the Council on the findings of this review, so that Council can consider potential variations or expansion to the definition of 'local community groups'; and

(iv) also update the Council on progress with the online booking system which Council has been developing to make it easier for residents and community organisations to more quickly identify and book spaces.

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