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Local governments provide financial hardship support

The Auditor General today tabled in Parliament a report on [Local Government COVID-19 Financial Hardship Support](#).

The audit assessed if 3 local government (LG) entities provided effective financial hardship support to assist ratepayers impacted by COVID-19 response measures.

Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said it was pleasing that most LG entities stepped up and provided support, in some instances over and above what was requested by the State Government.

'However, we found instances where help didn't reach those in need because LG entities either didn't do enough to tell their local communities about the support available or made it too difficult to access,' Ms Spencer said.

Ms Spencer said it was critical LG entities balance application and assessment costs with the value of any support provided, to ensure eligible applicants receive timely support at their time of need.

'The LG entities who delivered for their communities not only provided financial support to ratepayers assessed as being in financial hardship but, at their own initiative, supported all ratepayers by providing interest waivers or allowing additional time to pay rates,' Ms Spencer said.

All 3 entities had financial hardship policies for 2020-21, as encouraged by the then Minister for Local Government, however the Shire of Northampton did not promote its policy, establish processes to implement it or receive any applications.

The cities of Belmont and Rockingham promoted the availability of financial support to their ratepayers, made their policies and application forms available on their websites, and established eligibility criteria and processes to assess applications in line with their policies.

However, while Belmont's processes reflected the dollar value of support available, Rockingham's did not. In our view, Rockingham's approach was time consuming and onerous for ratepayers in need of short-term support.

'For some ratepayers the process to access help was so onerous, they may have withdrawn their applications for support,' Ms Spencer said.

The audit also included a review of whether Western Australia's other LG entities had financial hardship policies in place.

'We found 123 of 137 LG entities had a financial hardship policy in 2020-21 and encouragingly most have kept these for 2021-22 or have taken a longer-term view and adapted their policies to apply beyond the pandemic,' Ms Spencer said.

The report includes recommendations for all LG entities including that they should balance application and assessment costs with the value of any support provided, to ensure eligible applicants receive timely support at their time of need.

Report resources

- [PDF version](#)
- [summary video](#)