



Gunnedah Shire Council

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response Strategy

March 2020

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1. Executive Summary

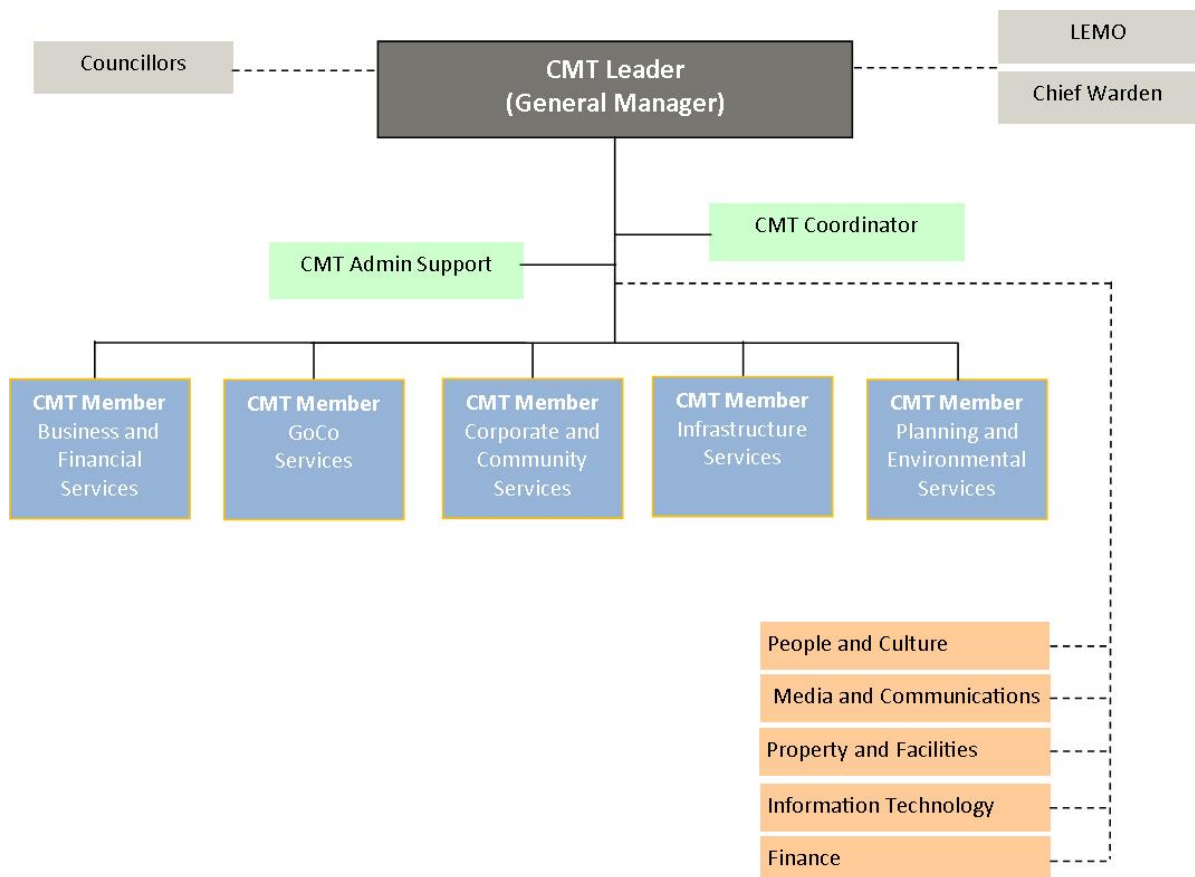
The COVID-19 pandemic will require a whole of community response but Gunnedah Shire Council (GSC) has a very important leadership role to play in this situation. During this pandemic, Council’s priorities are to:

- Maintain the essential services that Council provides to the community
- Communicate with the community about the situation and Council’s services
- Protect the health and safety of our workforce
- Support other government agencies to manage/minimise the impact of the pandemic.

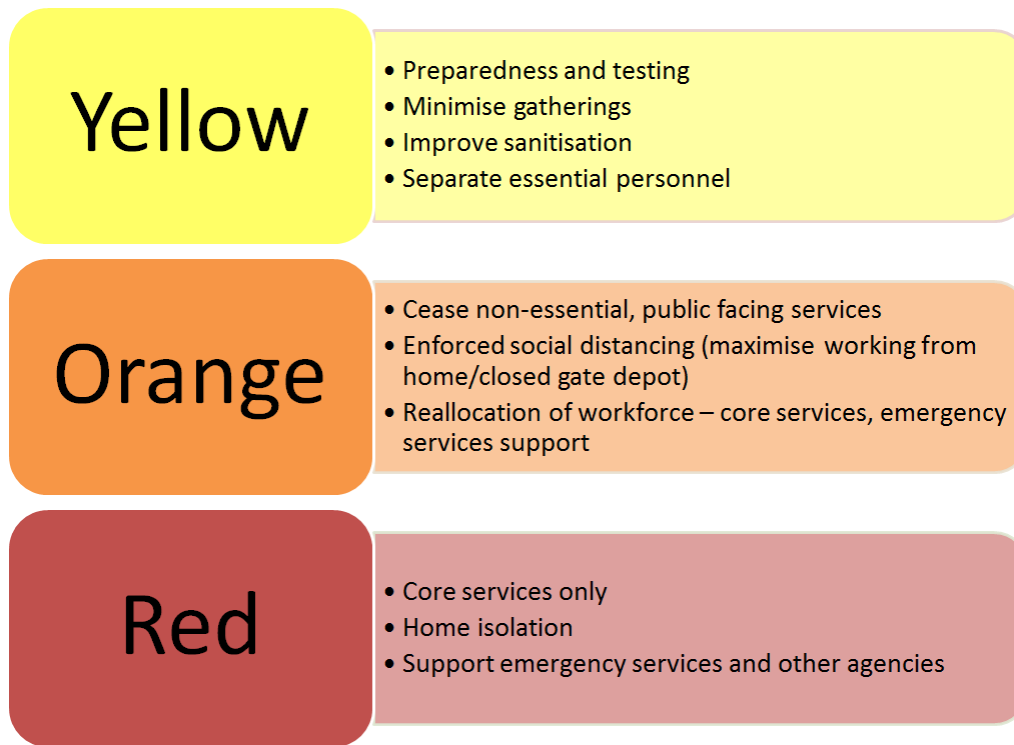
As of the date of writing this Strategy, the situation in relation to COVID-19 continues to evolve very quickly, the Gunnedah Shire, while currently free of known cases of the disease, will no doubt be affected in the very near future and the situation on a national level is being driven by State and Federal decision-makers.

Gunnedah Shire Council has in place a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) that provides a Governance framework to control the response to disasters such as a pandemic. To date, the BCP has been partially enacted but the escalating situation will warrant a Level 2 Activation of the BCP which was declared by the General Manager on 18 March 2020.

Under this BCP activation scenario, management of the event will be led by the Continuity Management Team (CMT). Council’s CMT structure as detailed in the March 2020 BCP is shown below:



This Response Plan has been endorsed by the CMT and at a high level encompasses a proportionate but escalating response in three stages. As at the time of writing this plan, the GSC is already in stage “Yellow” and has currently implemented most of the actions listed in this stage. Defining and colour coding these stages will allow both staff and the community to understand what to expect at varying levels of escalation and improve communication during this fast-moving situation.

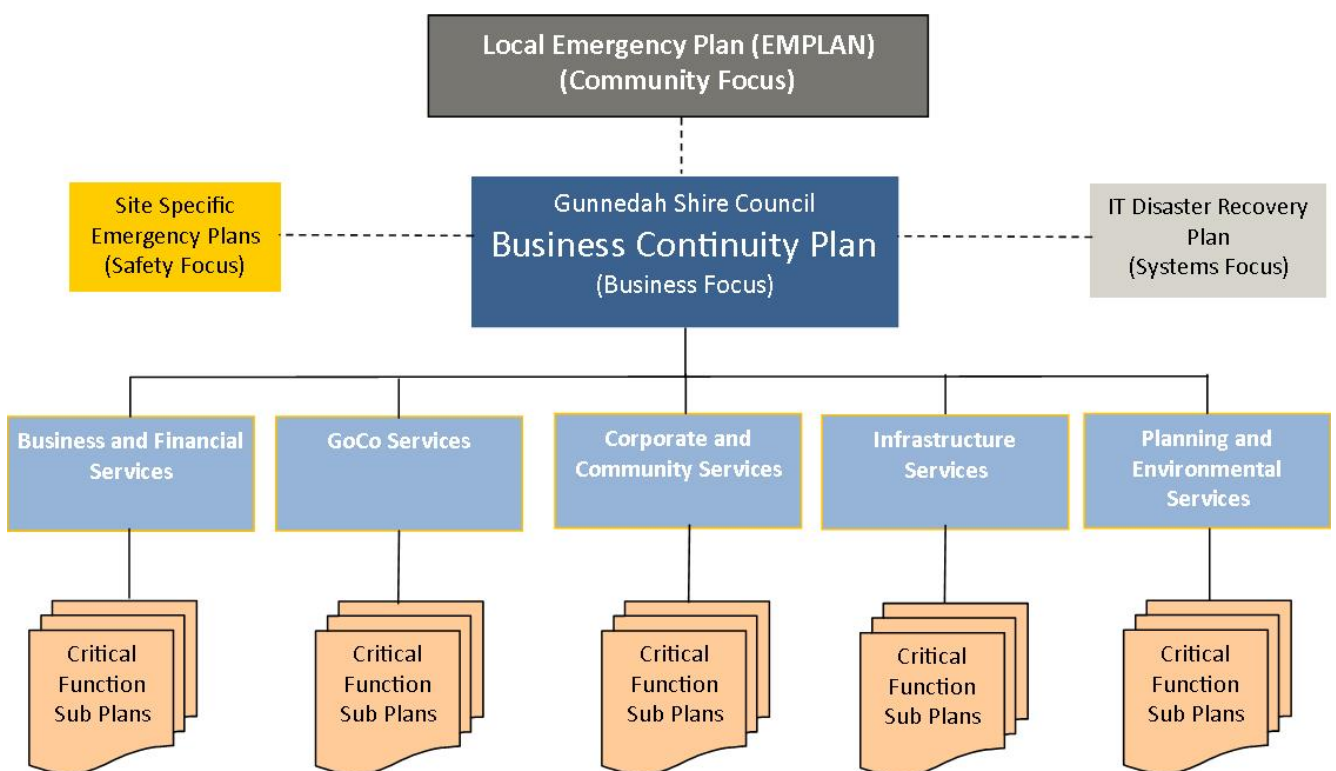


While the Gunnedah Shire and the broader nation has challenging times ahead, GSC is well placed to deal with the situation having just undertaken a full review of the BCP including a focus on pandemic responsiveness and a lower, widely dispersed population providing advantages that can be leveraged by decisive and early action. Although this is a difficult situation, where changes can be implemented that provide a long-term improvement (such as digitisation of processes), this situation may present an opportunity to fast-track those changes and drive innovation.

2. Response Strategy Context

This Response Strategy, having been endorsed by the CMT, fits within the Gunnedah Shire Council Business Continuity Plan (Business Focus) as shown on the diagram below. The Local Emergency Plan (EMPLAN) /Hunter New England Health will be the lead bodies tasked with dealing with the broader community emergency, and Council will play a supporting role. This plan has a specific focus on Council business . Its context within the BCP framework is referenced in Section 3.11 of the BCP Procedure (P. 21).

The diagram outlines the relationship of the Business Continuity arrangements in respect of other relevant arrangements.



3. Response Stages

A key goal of the decision-making process is to achieve a response that is proportionate to the level of risk, acknowledging that the risk is not the same across all corporate functions. A response that is appropriate to the level of impact the coronavirus outbreak is likely to have on the community, and on vulnerable populations within the community, will make the best use of the resources available and minimise social disruption.

To clearly show how the approach will change over the course of responding to the outbreak, the strategy is divided into escalating stages that are designed to provide clear guidance to staff and the community on what is being done currently and what will come in future at the time that the CMT Leader determines it is appropriate to move to the next colour-coded stage.

Stage	Strategy	Description
1. Yellow	1. Preparedness and testing	The COVID-19 issue will continue to escalate over the coming weeks; this is the time to prepare for mass working from home, review operational procedures, communicate with staff about HR issues/entitlements, test new operational procedures and working from home arrangements as well as stockpile essential equipment and supplies.
	2. Minimise gatherings	Where the risk profile to our staff and the community can be lowered in accordance with Federal/State guidance or without an impact to our current service level, these actions should be implemented. This includes cancelling non-essential meetings, staff travel and high-risk events.
	3. Improve sanitisation	Good hygiene practices are essential to slowing the spread of the virus and reducing risk to staff and the community. Appropriate strategies to educate staff and to provide for increased levels of sanitisation and improved hygiene for both staff and the public needs to be pursued where possible.
	4. Separate essential personnel	GSC may face an issue where an infection of one member of staff will require the quarantine of close contacts and/or remove a critical staff member from the workforce for a prolonged period due to illness. Strategies should be implemented that separate and reduce or eliminate contact between groups of staff to prevent cross-contamination.
2. Orange	1. Cease non-essential public facing services	Non-essential public facing services should cease and consideration be given to the standing-down of non-public facing, non-essential services to reduce the load on IT systems on a case-by-case basis.
	2. Enforced social distancing (maximise working from home/closed gate depot)	Enforce social distancing measures in the office by maximising working from home, having skeleton office crews isolated from each other and spread out among council facilities. Outdoor crews to have only controlled access to depot, take vehicles home and travel directly to and from worksites etc. Communication methods to be primarily electronic.

Stage	Strategy	Description
	3. Reallocation of workforce (critical services, emergency services support)	A number of non-essential staff that are stood down or working from home in a reduced capacity may be able to be trained as backups for critical staff in the event that illness prevents them from working. Staff may be called upon to assist local emergency services in varying capacities.
3. Red	1. Critical services only	Council operations are reduced to only those services that are considered critical services and those services only to be delivered by the minimum number of personnel.
	2. Home Isolation	With most staff isolated at home and able to work up to the limits of the IT capability, this would be encouraged where this is practical, however there would be little-to-no onsite personnel and this may require a temporary mass stand-down of staff.
	3. Support for emergency services and other agencies	Some staff may be required to support emergency operations at the direction of the LEMC/Lead Agency.

4. Communication

Communication both internally and externally is a key function of business continuity management. A separate communications plan relevant to Council's COVID-19 response has been developed in conjunction with this document.

5. Response Strategy Actions

Stage	Strategy	Action
1. Yellow	1. Preparedness and testing	1.1.1 Development of a Coronavirus Response Strategy and Communications Plan.
		1.1.2 All managers to familiarise themselves with the BCP and latest version made available for all staff.
		1.1.3 All managers/directors to review BCP sub-plans to examine how continuity would be affected in a pandemic scenario with high absenteeism (50%+), regions quarantined preventing staff and goods from leaving or arriving, schools are closed and other social distancing introduced.
		1.1.4 Information Technology Department to develop and implement a prioritised plan taking into account availability of resources to provide for remote access for all staff ASAP.
		1.1.5 Information Technology to investigate/implement the provision of additional services/applications that will improve communication and ability to sustain prolonged work from home arrangements.
		1.1.6 Stores to check stock and where possible make adequate provision for essential stock and spares. Key staff to collaborate to advise what products are required.
		1.1.7 Other business units that require stock or spares that are not serviced by stores to consider supply chains and make adequate provision for stock.
		1.1.8 Collect mobile numbers of staff and develop SMS communications channel to maintain communications during an emergency.
		1.1.8.1 Confirm contact details of all GOCO volunteers and aged care clients to enable SMS bulk communication through Council's preferred platform.
		1.1.9 Consider scenarios that may develop and the Council/Award response with regard to employee entitlements and leave and provide advice to staff on Council's approach to such.
		1.1.10 Develop new operating procedures and processes that will support a reduced/socially distanced workforce and commence operations to test these.
1.1.11 Review Safe Work Method Statements and update where necessary new procedures and		

Stage	Strategy	Action
		consider temporary or replacement staff.
		1.1.12 Review public facing staffing arrangements and plan for alternate methods of delivery should this be required.
		1.1.13 Increase the delegations to the Mayor and General Manager to provide for emergency expenditure.
		1.1.14 Test the LEMC facility in the training centre to make sure all equipment is operational.
		1.1.15 Activate the BCP at Level 2 in preparation for scale up to full Level 3 BCP activation at an appropriate time should that be required.
		1.1.16 Develop GoCo risk management strategy and “Wellbeing Matrix” to assess client risk and to review and create scalable actions for current and emerging risks.
		1.1.17 Develop GoCo Aged Care specific procedure and communication plan for aged care staff, volunteers, brokers and staff.
		1.1.18 Brokerage suppliers who deliver services to our elderly and vulnerable populations will be contacted to ensure they have measures in place.
		1.1.19 Source additional meals for Meal on Wheels clients in case of illness.
		1.1.16 Contact all clients with in-home services to determine if they have other supports and level of risk.
		1.1.17 Identify areas that are suitable for redeployment of non-essential and casual staff. Also develop second on-call roster of redeployed personnel.
	2. Minimise gatherings	1.2.1 All non-essential, work-related travel banned
		1.2.2 Internal and external face-to-face meetings to be cancelled or held via electronic means where it is practical to do so, any meetings that must be held in person to be via appointment.
		1.2.3 Reduce the need for customers to visit the administration building by promoting online service and considering reduced customer service hours (including Duty Planner Services).
		1.2.4 Cancellation of events and regular programs and gatherings that are operated by Council such as Library, GOCO, Youth and Arts/Cultural events.
		1.2.5 Council should consider denying access to Council facilities to community groups that do not voluntarily cancel their events if event is perceived to be a risk.
		1.2.6 Encourage commencement of work from home plans for staff that are able to do so

Stage	Strategy	Action
		<p>effectively from now or consider whether there are non-essential staff that would like to volunteer to take leave.</p> <p>1.2.7 Shut the Civic Cinema and do not provide movie screenings for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>1.2.8 Reallocate staff seating within the building so as to maximise distance between people.</p> <p>1.2.9 Staff encouraged to go home, eat at their desk or in separate areas and not to congregate in common areas during meal breaks.</p> <p>1.2.10 Reduce the need for GoCo clients and volunteers to visit the offices. Implement sign-in sheets for all visitors to declare their health and understanding.</p> <p>1.2.11 Reduction in transport services to essential trips and minimise the number of passengers for each vehicle based on social distancing guidelines.</p>
	3. Improve sanitisation	<p>1.3.1 Provide education to staff and the public about the importance of hygiene and hand washing.</p> <p>1.3.2 Provide improved sanitation awareness in public spaces with signage and the provision of soap/sanitiser to encourage hand washing.</p> <p>1.3.3 Increase the level and frequency of cleaning undertaken at Council offices to improve sanitisation.</p> <p>1.3.4 Consider and implement a plan for increased and more frequent sanitation/cleaning at Council's public facilities, eg. Livi's place, swimming pool, service vehicles, GoCO offices and the Visitor Information Centre.</p> <p>1.3.5 GoCo provide education to staff, volunteers and public on hygiene and hand washing in offices, vehicles, including specific information from peak bodies such as Meals on Wheels, Transport for NSW, Department of Health and Leading Aged Services Australia.</p> <p>1.3.6 Training and information for Aged Care-related service delivery will be provided to GoCo staff and volunteers.</p>
	4. Separate essential personnel	<p>1.4.1 Implement the separation of critical personnel so that one infection does not take out all critical personnel. This may include splitting up into smaller work crews and keeping them separate, having some groups work from home on a separate roster etc. Attention to be paid to the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste • Rangers

Stage	Strategy	Action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewerage Treatment Works • Water/Sewer • Information Technology • Finance • Media/Communications • Executive Management/CMT • Parks/Public Facilities (Airport, Emergency Ops) • Development Services (planning) • GOCO outlets
2. Orange	1. Cease non-critical public facing services	<p>2.1.1 Closure of non-critical public facing services to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library (single staff member - book delivery service only – need SWMS for this) • Major parks/sports grounds • Closure of some public toilets including those in the villages other than <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Redbank * Brock Court * Mullaley Road Rest Stop • Satellite waste sites in villages • Pool • Cultural Precinct (Conservatorium to make their own determination) • Admin Building (no face-to-face customer service) • GOCO groups and non-essential/low-risk services types
		<p>2.1.2 Saleyards to enact plan to reduce onsite personnel and minimise risk.</p>
		<p>2.1.3 Case-by-case assessment of other non-critical services to determine if a stand-down of some or all of that service and associated personnel is required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Planning • Economic Development • Youth • Customer Service • Records • Human Resources • GOCO – Group services and outings, non-essential transport, services not required to maintain clients nutrition, hygiene or clinical care needs. • GOCO volunteers considered in at-risk groups.
		<p>2.1.4 Reassess works program and major projects</p>

Stage	Strategy	Action
		and consider contract risk, cancel any non-essential work.
	2. Enforced social distancing (maximise working from home/closed gate depot)	2.2.1 All staff able to work from home are to do so, others to be stood down until called for service.
		2.2.2 Social distancing enforced in office environments, shut down, network connected locations such as library, Cultural Precinct are used to spread staff between locations and maximise distancing.
		2.2.3 Outdoor work crews are able to take vehicles and items of equipment home where practical to allow direct commencement with no need to attend the depot.
		2.2.4 Access to the depot is controlled to enforce social distancing and prevent congregation.
		2.2.5 In some cases, stores and equipment are delivered onsite rather than having groups attending the depot.
		2.2.6 Provision is made for reimbursement of staff using personal mobile phones for work use to support coordination of workers via mobile telephone.
		2.2.7 Managers/HR to undertake regular welfare checks via telephone and offer support.
		2.2.8 Review of PPE and SWMS to consider measures such as the implementation of temperature checks on commencement, use of masks, gloves by outdoor/indoor staff.
		2.2.9 Maximise building ventilation and implement additional sanitation measures between shifts such as wiping down of phones, equipment, plant.
		2.2.10 Aged Care clients identified as at risk (over 80, pre-existing conditions) are not to be delivered any non-essential services.
		2.2.11 Consider and plan for risks or unavailability of key contractors, including but not limited to: electrical services, security contracts, cleaners, excavator operators for graves.
	3. Reallocation of workforce (critical; services, emergency services support)	2.3.1 Managers of critical services consider the training/education of staff that have been stood down to fill critical functions should existing staff become sick.
2.3.2 Respond to the direction from the LEMC and other agencies and provide assistance to support the broader response where stood down or appropriately skilled staff be required to be made available		
3. Red	1. Critical	3.1.1 Council services operate on skeleton crews with only essential works undertaken with the

Stage	Strategy	Action
	services only	<p>following areas operational in a minimal capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste (Gunnedah WMF and Kerbside collection only) • STP • Water/Sewer • IT • Finance • Customer Service/Media • Parks/Public Facilities (Cemeteries, Emergency Operations Facilities) • Roads • GOCO • Rangers
		3.1.2 Customer Service telephone operated on a 24x7 roster with one operator to ensure ongoing availability.
		3.1.3 GoCo clients identified as being at-risk on the “client risk register” to be sent to brokers to prioritise essential service delivery to those at greatest need.
	2. Home Isolation	3.2.1 All office locations shut down with only essential personnel leaving their homes and doing so in required PPE.
		3.2.2 Other staff able to work from home on non-core services so long as priority is given to delivery of critical services.
		3.2.3 All staff communication for wellbeing check-ups/ mental health and daily updates via SMS including any changes in expected conditions.
	3. Support for emergency services and other agencies	3.3.1 Staff not involved in the delivery of core services may be called to assist other agencies in the response.

6. Projected Implementation Schedule

There is no fixed rule to how this strategy will all be implemented and it is important that there is some flexibility in the plan. Some general guidance on how the progression through the levels may come into being is detailed below.

1. Stage Yellow – We are currently (as at 18/03/20) in this stage and managers should plan for work to be completed on all items within this section of the plan by Friday 20 March.
2. Stage Orange – This stage will likely be triggered by the Federal Government direction to enact closure of schools/restaurants/cafes and businesses.
3. Stage Red – This stage would be enacted in a disaster scenario where a lock down is in place and large numbers of critical personnel are no longer able to work due to being ill or caring for those that are ill.

Managers should plan for this to be a very fast-moving switch between Stage Yellow and Stage Orange. It is advised that aiming for all Yellow items to be finished as much as possible by Friday 20 March and prepared for a move to Stage Orange commencing Saturday 21 March.