
Rous Cultural, Environmental and Information Centre

Responsible Officer: Group Manager People and Performance (Helen McNeil)

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Receive and note this report.
2. Endorse the termination of the lease of 207 Molesworth Street, Lismore.
3. Endorse the reallocation of funds to the catchment and cultural awareness budget for progressing reconciliation activities.
4. Receive a progress report at the February 2023 Council Meeting.

Background

On 16 June 2021, Council received the attached report regarding the establishment of the Rous Cultural, Environmental and Information Centre ("RCEIC") at the former Lismore Visitor Information Centre at 207 Molesworth Street, Lismore.

The RCEIC was opened to the public on 1 December 2021.

Following the flood events of 2022, the RCEIC was inundated and suffered significant damage. The majority of Rous' fit out was destroyed.

Lismore City Council (LCC), as the owner of the property has requested Rous advise whether there is an intention to recommence operations of the RCEIC. This request is due to the need for LCC to prioritise asset repairs.

It is proposed that Rous does not recommence operations of the RCEIC and that staff proceed with steps to terminate the lease.

The agreed position between Rous and LCC was that Rous occupy the premises by way of registered lease, and then grant back to LCC a non-exclusive licence for the delivery of visitor services. The staffing and operational hours of the RCEIC were shared between Rous and LCC on a roster basis.

As at the date of writing this report, LCC staff have not confirmed whether it is intended that LCC will recommence visitor services at the site. In the event that LCC visitor services do not recommence then this would present a further challenge to Rous resuming operations. Staffing arrangements were in place between Rous and LCC to enable the RCEIC to operate 7 days per week. Without LCC's partnership and support the RCEIC will not operate over weekends. While these considerations do not impact the proposal to terminate the lease, they are relevant in relation to the mechanism used to terminate the lease (refer to 'Legal' section of the report).

Governance

- **Integrated Planning and Reporting**

Strategic Objective 2.3.4 states:

We respect our local Aboriginal history and culture, and work positively to engage our First Nations community

Activities and initiatives planned to be delivered through the RCEIC will be reviewed having regard to where reconciliation efforts will be of most value post-flood. The impact of the disaster has been widespread and devastating therefore it is appropriate to ensure that short – medium term actions and activities are appropriate. All efforts will continue to be aligned with

and support Rous' Strategic Objective 2.3.4 including as part of and through the Reconciliation Action Plan.

- **Finance**

The previously allocated budgets for the RCEIC are proposed to be reallocated in the September 2022 Quarterly Budget Review. Additional funding is not required as a consequence of the actions proposed in this report.

- **Legal**

Clause 8 of the current lease for 207 Molesworth Street, allows Rous to terminate the lease if the premises cannot be made good. While LCC have advised they intend to repair the premises, given Council's relocation to Gallans Rd, Ballina it is likely that these repairs will not occur prior to Council's relocation. As noted earlier, LCC's future plans for visitor services will determine the legal basis to terminate the lease.

Consultation

The RCEIC project was undertaken in consultation with Council's Group Manager Corporate and Commercial, Catchment and Cultural Awareness Manager and Governance Advisor and LCC staff. Since the flooding events, internal consultation has occurred which also includes Rous' recently appointed Reconciliation Liaison Officer however external consultation has proved difficult due to flood recovery works. If the recommendations of this report are endorsed, staff will continue to attempt to liaise with LCC with a view to ending the tenancy at 207 Molesworth Street, Lismore.

Conclusion

It is proposed that operation of the RCEIC not resume and as a consequence that staff progress steps to terminate the lease of 207 Molesworth Street, Lismore. Council's opportunity to test and improve its reach and effectiveness in delivering cultural, environmental and related technical information is still an objective which provides a valuable and innovative outcome to be progressed under the auspices of the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Attachment

1. Rous Cultural Environmental Information Centre – Council report 15-06-2022