

COUNCIL REPORT

2nd Ordinary Council Meeting

AGENDA ITEM:	13.1.4
REPORT TITLE:	Palmerston Recreation Centre Operational Use
MEETING DATE:	Tuesday 15 October 2024
AUTHOR:	General Manager Community, Konrad Seidl
APPROVER:	Chief Executive Officer, Amelia Vellar

COMMUNITY PLAN

Family and Community: Palmerston is a safe and family friendly community where everyone belongs.

PURPOSE

This Report seeks Council approval to undertake a three (3) month trial to alter the operating model of the Palmerston Recreation Centre.

KEY MESSAGES

- City of Palmerston is committed to ensuring safe and accessible spaces are available for the community.
- City of Palmerston has committed to providing free facility hire for Not-for-Profit groups until June 2025.
- The Palmerston Recreation Centre is a popular venue with a diverse group of users that utilise the community rooms and stadium.
- It is important that all users of Council facilities are safe.
- Unfortunately, there have been ongoing incidents of antisocial behaviour in and around the Palmerston Recreation Centre, resulting in staff and users feeling unsafe at times
- The Palmerston Recreation Centre does have security assistance intermittently but not for all opening hours.
- There is the potential for additional community spaces within the Centre to be used as bookable areas for informal meetings.
- To minimise the risk of Antisocial Behaviour at the centre, in addition to providing additional community space, it is proposed that a three (3) month trial be implemented to change the operating model of the Palmerston Recreation Centre.
- If City of Palmerston were to continue the existing open-door practice, adequate measures would be required to mitigate the risks to users and staff and to provide an appropriate response to people accessing the facility. This could include a permanent presence of outreach services which would need to be explored and costed or an increased security presence across all hours of booking times.

RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT Report entitled Palmerston Recreation Centre Operational Use be received and noted.
2. THAT Council approve a three (3) month trial, commencing 1 November 2024, to:
 - a. Introduce additional, informal meeting spaces that are able to be booked, in the Palmerston Recreation Centre foyer.

- b. Provide full public access to the Palmerston Recreation Centre including access to the showers and toilets, between 8am to 10am, Monday to Friday, excluding days when the facility is closed.
 - c. Provide access to the Palmerston Recreation Centre to users with a booking only, from 10am onwards Monday to Friday.
3. THAT a further report that outlines the impacts and suggested continuation, or not, of the change in operating model for the Palmerston Recreation Centre, is presented to Council by the second ordinary meeting of February 2025.

BACKGROUND

The Palmerston Recreation Centre offers versatile community rooms and sporting facilities designed to serve the needs of Palmerston residents, providing spaces for a wide range of events, activities, and sports. City of Palmerston has committed to providing free facility hire for Not-for-Profit groups until June 2025. The stadium within the Palmerston Recreation Centre is utilised by eight (8) basketball groups, as well as for volleyball, netball, badminton, and various community events. The Community Rooms accommodate diverse activities such as yoga, Zumba, Pilates, dance, and sword fighting, in addition to hosting meetings, training sessions, and religious gatherings. The Centre is a popular and essential community facility in the Palmerston CBD.

The 2024 City of Palmerston Community Satisfaction Survey provided a positive result in relation to the Recreation Centre with a score of 7.53, a 0.38 improvement on the previous year. Conversely, crime and safety have been an ongoing concern for the Palmerston community over several years, this year again being the highest detractor at 74 percent. The recommendations within this report provide an avenue for Council to demonstrate action toward addressing safety issues, potentially improving the community sentiment toward safety and the Recreation Centre.

The report seeks to address the following two issues, through the recommended implementation of a three (3) month trial to alter the operating model of the Palmerston Recreation Centre:

- Respond to public inquiries for additional meeting spaces in the Palmerston CBD; and
- To ensure that users and staff of the Palmerston Recreation Centre are safe, and the centre is utilised appropriately.

DISCUSSION

The driver for recommending a change to the operating model comes from ongoing incidents of antisocial behaviour in and around the Palmerston Recreation Centre that have placed users and staff at personal risk. Staff have received feedback from the users of the Centre that they frequently do not feel safe in the Centre including members of the senior's community and other users such as baby groups. User behaviour within the building and externally are currently managed by staff and Goyder Square Security when incidents occur. Staff have been intermittently locking the building front door when tensions appear high in the building proximity or as needed.

City of Palmerston has responsibilities for staff and patrons under the *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* to protect workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety and welfare through the elimination or minimisation of risks.

The existing building design and proximity of staff does not provide an ability for staff to monitor who is in the building from all angles. The corridors are currently unmonitored as is the entry to the toilets, and bookable spaces. It is also not the role of council staff to manage anti-social behaviour in community centres. The Palmerston Recreation Centre does have security assistance intermittently at the site but not for all opening hours.

Providing accessible spaces for the entire community is important and the nearby City of Palmerston Library, including the foyer space, is available for all members of the community for respite from weather and has public toilets and drinking water facilities. Currently, the Recreation Centre is utilised for similar purposes, in addition to having shower facilities, which are mostly utilised in the morning.

The Recreation Centre has the ability to provide additional, bookable, spaces for the community in the foyer area(s). With the areas currently able to be accessed at most times, this is not an option that is able to be provided to the community.

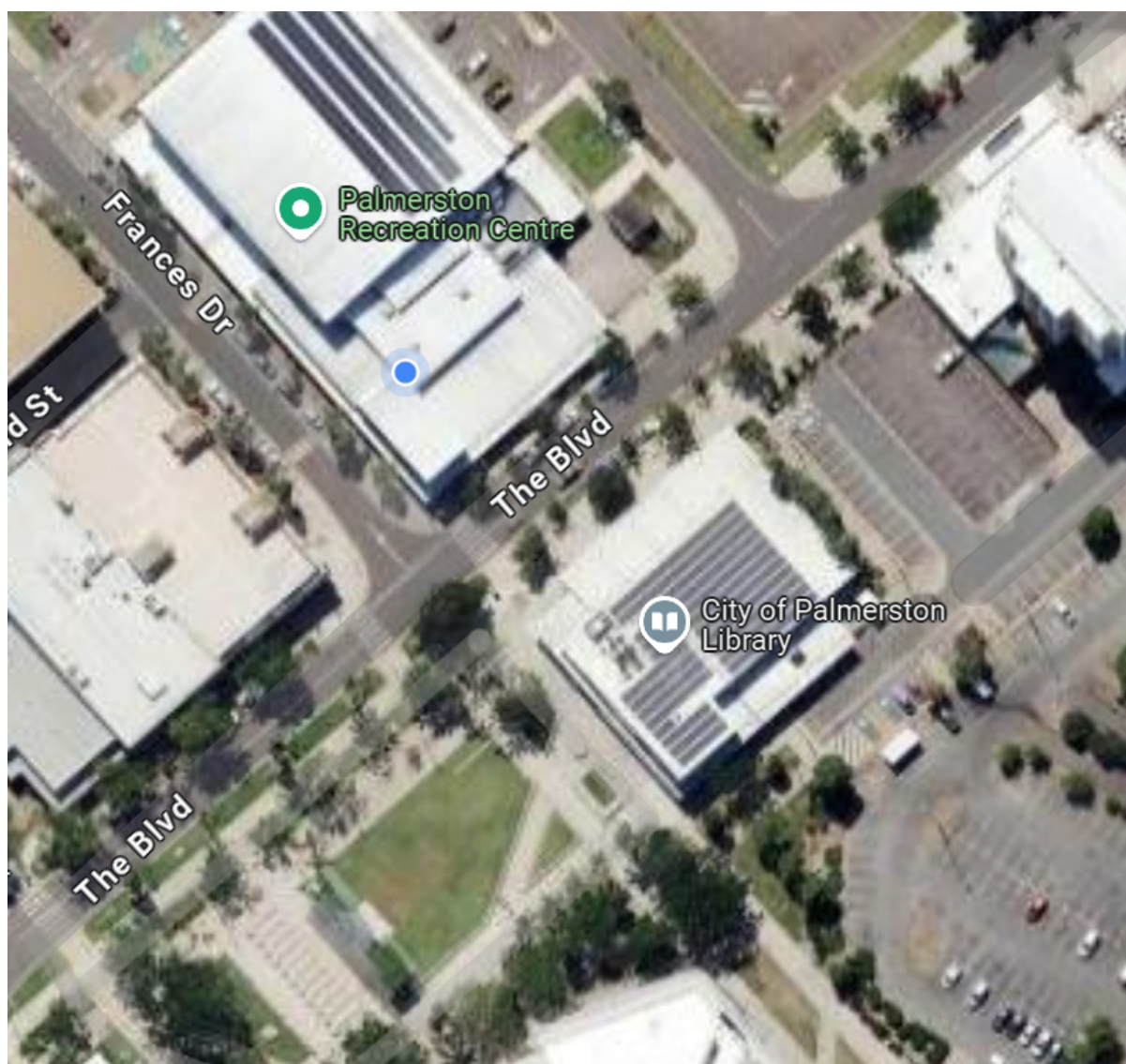


Image: Palmerston Recreation Centre and Library locations

Currently showers at the Recreation Centre are available for the public at all times and are utilised by booking groups and people experiencing homelessness. This presents challenges in monitoring the bathrooms, hygiene, and cleanliness, however, also provides an important service to vulnerable members of our community. While City of Palmerston is demonstrating good will in providing accessibility to showers and other services, it should be noted that there are other Government agencies and Not-For-Profit Organisations that are better positioned to provide wrap around services for people experiencing

homelessness in the community. City of Palmerston support Orange Sky to provide shower services and laundry services once a week from the Recreation Centre.

The current operating model for the Recreation Centre is not equipped to provide the support services needed for people experiencing homelessness whilst providing a safe space for community bookings and staff.

Officers recommend the provision of full public access to the Palmerston Recreation Centre including access to showers and toilets, remain available between 8am to 10am, Monday to Friday. This ensures that this service is still available for the community, with the recommended change being that after these times, that the Centre is only available to users that have a booking. This time is suggested due to internal data showing that less antisocial behaviour is witnessed at this time. It is recommended that this is trialled for 3 months with a report to Council outlining the success or otherwise coming back to the Chamber in February 2025. Officers recommend that this trial begins 1 November to allow time to notify the community.

As has been noted, this would then provide an opportunity to expand City of Palmerston booking options with the introduction of a Community/Business Hub for informal meeting spaces in the foyer area of the Recreation Centre.

The identified spaces are able to be added to existing booking systems free of charge, with the potential for both community groups and business users to be able to book the space(s).

Concept options have previously been prepared for consideration, with the below an example of the type of areas that would be implemented for bookings.



Image: Concept image of potential bookable spaces at the Palmerston Recreation Centre.

In summary, it is recommended that a new operational model is trialled at the Palmerston Recreation Centre for a three (3) month period, commencing on the 1 November 2024. This model will include;

- Addition of new, bookable, spaces within the Recreation Centre foyer area,
- Continuation of availability for shower and bathroom facilities for the community from 8am to 10am Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays and other periods of the facility being closed).

- Access to the Recreation Centre outside of 8am to 10am (Monday to Friday) is limited to users that have a booking.

CONSULTATION AND MARKETING

The following City of Palmerston staff were consulted in preparing this Report:

- Executive Manager Projects and Infrastructure Services
- City Activation Manager
- Community Services Manager
- Library Services Manager
- Health Safety and Wellbeing Coordinator

In preparing this Report, the following external parties were consulted:

- Officer in Charge Palmerston Police Station

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications for this Report.

BUDGET AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The procurement of furniture and items for the Community/Business Hub Meeting spaces will be acquired through existing approved budgets.

RISK, LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

City of Palmerston has clear responsibilities for staff and patrons under the *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* to protect workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety and welfare through the elimination or minimisation of risks.

Everyone has a right to be safe at work and this is enshrined in law. Staff have a right to be able to do their job without being or feeling threatened. Intentional acts of intimidation, violence against members of our staff and community will not be tolerated and Police are called in these instances.

If City of Palmerston were to continue the existing open-door practice, adequate measures would be required to mitigate the risks to users and staff and to provide an appropriate response to people accessing the facility. This could include a permanent presence of outreach services which would need to be explored and costed or an increased security presence across all hours of booking times. An increase in security service to this level would be an additional cost of approximately \$115,000 per year.

City of Palmerston staff attend the Northern Territory Government led interagency Daily Patrollers Meeting and the fortnightly Interagency Tasking and Coordination Groups, actively participating in discussions to identify locations of people requiring support, how collectively that support can be provided and how issues in the community may be addressed through various agencies.

This Report addresses the following City of Palmerston Strategic Risks:

1. **Community Safety**
Failure of Council to effectively plan and deliver its role in community safety.

STRATEGIES, FRAMEWORK AND PLANS IMPLICATIONS

This Report relates to the following City of Palmerston Strategies, Framework and Plans:

- Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible Policy Framework
- Palmerston Local Economic Plan 2021-2031

COUNCIL OFFICER CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We the author and approving officer declare that we do not have a conflict of interest in relation to this matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil