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# Funds for local business groups slashed

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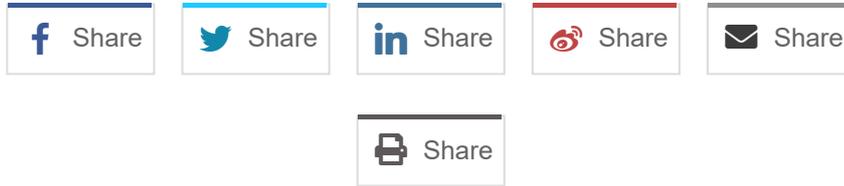
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BY ELIOT BARHAM

Local business groups in the City of Sydney are preparing to tighten their belts following massive cuts to their allocated funds from council.

Four Chambers of Commerce received a total of \$148,500 at this month's council meeting. The same four groups received \$409,000 combined several years ago. The cuts represent a two thirds reduction in funds for the Chippendale Creative Precinct, the Glebe Chamber of Commerce, the Pyrmont Ultimo Chamber of Commerce and South Sydney Business Chamber.

City of Sydney Councillor Craig Chung, said: "Traditionally the Chamber of Commerce is there to help family business grow and create jobs... they are the life blood of the little villages where the Chambers exist."

"To take funding out of the Chambers is completely short sighted."

While funding for the Chambers has been slashed, extra funds have been directed into other groups which Cr Chung believes is irresponsible.

"It seems to be incongruous they are taking money out of the Chamber which is servicing hundreds if not thousands of small businesses, and increase funding to organisations who have no economic impact at all," he said.

Business groups are eligible to apply for funds through a Village Business Grant program. According to the City of Sydney's website, "the village business grant provides funds for initiatives and projects that revitalise and enhance local commercial and retail precincts, build capacity in business operators, strengthen local business networks, and enhance diversity, precinct brand and the local area's character."

Official Spokesperson for the Glebe Chamber of Commerce, Jenny Burn, said that although some may view the changes in a negative light, it's a good opportunity for groups to rethink the way they operate.

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“The point is there is a pie. With the increase in the numbers of people putting in grant applications, everybody got cut because there’s one pie, and it’s being distributed as fairly as they can around all the different applicants” she said.

“The council recognises that the system isn’t working and for the first time since I’ve been involved, they’re very actively working with us alongside other stakeholders to do something that offers more sustainability or bang for the buck.”

On Monday Ms Burn made a formal submission to the City of Sydney grant funding committee that, according to Liberal Councillor Christine Forster, “basically suggested that if they get the amount of money they’ve been offered they can’t survive.”

The funding cuts follow a disorganised campaign by the City of Sydney Council that left many business owners unaware of the cut off date for enrollment in the election earlier this year, despite the council allocating \$12 million to ensure it fulfilled its legal obligation to contact and enroll every eligible business within the LGA.

Critics have suggested the council deliberately muddled the process to stymie business votes which counted for double those of residents, following controversial voting laws introduced by the Baird Government in 2014.

Ms Moore described the voting reform as ‘gerrymander’, but ended up increasing her vote and was re-elected as the Mayor for a mammoth fourth term after business votes fell well short of the required numbers.

Ms Forster doubted that there is “any evidence to suggest that the Lord Mayor has decided the business vote isn’t significant and therefore decided to cut funding,” saying it is “a long bow to draw.”

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