Minister for Business and Better Regulation
Question Time Briefs
September 2021

Ref No	Page number	Title	Status	Reason for Exemption
1	2	How Will the Amp It Up! Fund Help Live Music Venues Recover from the Impacts of COVID-19?	Full	n/a
2	5	What Has ACT Government Done to Help Small Business Recover from the Pandemic?	Full	n/a
3	10	What Has Happened with ChooseCBR?	Full	n/a

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/2987

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

ISSUE: How will the *Amp it Up!* Fund help live music venues recover from the impacts of COVID-19?

Communications, media and engagement implications

- Announcement of funding https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/cheyne/2021/local-music-venues-and-musicians-ready-to-amp-it-up.
- BMA article

  https://bmamag.com/2021/06/24/local-music-venues-and-musicians-ready-to-amp-it-up-3/

Talking points:

- I announced the succcesful 23 venues at a total of $790,000 in funding on 24 June 2021. Given the high demand and strong applications, the Government provided additional funding for the program above the initial $700,000 allocation.
- The additional $90,000 was made up from unspent funds of $50,000 from the Event Fund and $40,000 from the Arts Fund.
- The successful applications represent a broad cross section of venues including bars, clubs, cafes, pubs and dedicated performance venues, and were from across the ACT including Civic, Belconnen, North Canberra, South Canberra and Tuggeranong.
- The support will help grow opportunities for local musicians and other performance artists to get back on stage, and give Canberrans and visitors even more great live entertainment options.
- The *Amp It Up!* Fund is designed to assist small to medium sized live venues to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 by offsetting the costs associated with performance, programming and promotion, offering live performance and music lovers an exciting calendar of gigs from June to November 2021.
- The fund covered payments to artists and technicians, and for up to 50% of marketing costs. Venues did not receive funding for any administration.
- Given the current lockdown, the Government will be flexible in extending the time period for the program beyond November 2021, if necessary.

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ACT Government

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Amp It Up! Freedom of Information

- MusicACT was selected to assist with administering the fund and providing information to applicants, as it is the only organisation in the ACT dedicated to supporting live contemporary music, and has a broad understanding of the music industry and live performance venues
- The assessment panel comprised two representatives from the Economic Development divison of CMTEDD (artsACT and Visit Canberra) and a representative from MusicACT.
- Panel members were required to sign Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Undertakings, and absent themselves where any conflicts were identified.
- Applications were assessed on merit against the assessment criteria and in competition with the other applications received.
- Applications were assessed on merit against the following criteria by a three-member panel with collective experience and skills in funding programs and live entertainment:
    - demonstrated history and role of the venue in supporting a diversity of original music and performance artists;
    - evidence that 50 per cent of the performances in the program include ACT-based artists;
    - demonstrated capacity and capability of the venue to effectively deliver the program; and
    - demonstrated capacity to positively impact the careers of ACT-based musicians and performance artists.
- All eligible applications were assessed against the equally weighted assessment criteria. The panel moderated assessments, including consideration of available funding, value for money and government priorities. The panel was able to offer a reduced level of funding than that requested if it deemed this appropriate in line with its assessment. Following the assessment, proposed projects were recommended to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation for agreement.

Background Information

- $750,000 was originally allocated to the *Amp It Up!* Fund, with $700,000 for applications, $40,000 for Music ACT to assist with administration of the program, and $10,000 for a Night-time Economy Forum to be held later in the year. A further $90,000 was allocated to the program for applications, making a total of $840,000.
- The funding round opened on 3 May 2021 and closed on 17 May 2021. Venues were supported by Music ACT to apply for funding.

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- Venues had to demonstrate that they regularly host live music or other performances, and/or have history of hiring acts, and/or have a dedicated performance and audience space.
- Venues could apply to meet 100% of their expected costs between 1 June 2021 and 30 November 2021 to pay artists and technicians, and up to 50% of their marketing and promotion costs. Venues did not receive funding for any other costs including for administration.
- As part of the assessment criteria, at least half of the acts programmed by venues for this fund need to be local acts, ensuring that we are continuing to provide opportunities and paid employment to local artists.
- The assessment panel met on 21 May 2021 to discuss and rank the applications and finalise the list of recommendations for your agreement.
- MusicACT supported local venues with their applications and programming and will continue to assist in the administration of the fund.
- An information night was held on Friday 30 April 2021 and was attended by some 22 venues.
- The Government received 35 applications for this fund requesting total funding of $1.27m with 12 applicants unsuccessful. The number of successful applicants was limited to the available program budget. The 12 unsuccessful applications did not address the assessment criteria as strongly as the successful applications.
- The assessment panel recommended 23 applications for funding, with 19 of those 23 applications able to be funded within the initial allocated budget of $700,000. The Minister for Business and Better Regulation had no role in determining which applications were recommended for funding and sought on advice on how all 23 applications assessed by the panel to be recommended for funding could be funded.
- The panel prepared a brief to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation with recommendations for agreement by the Minister. An additional $90,000 from unspent funds within Economic Development was agreed to support all 23 recommmended applications.
- Successful applicants to the Amp it Up! Program will need to acquit their funding as part of the standard reporting requirements. No formal review is planned.

There have have been no other funding programs or schemes specific to the music industry. A range of licence and fee waivers have been offered to the hospitality industry to assist it through the COVID-19 pandemic

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/2987

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

ISSUE: What has ACT Government done to help small business during the pandemic and current lockdown?

Communications, media and engagement implications:

- **9 Sept RiotACT:** Barr blames incomplete applications for slow business grant payouts RiotACT reports that over a third of applications are being sent back for more information because of insufficient evidence of eligibility.
- **8 Sept Canberra Times:** *ACT government revenue exceeds forecasts with $326 million boost***.** Canberra Times reports on higher than expected revenue from stamp duty, reducing the 2020-21 deficit to $363 million from a forecast $603 million. It also comments on the fiscal pressure from lockdown.
- **7 Sept Canberra Times:** *Opposition Leader Elizabeth Lee says Canberra businesses need greater certainty.* Ms Lee calls for greater certainty of a path out of lockdown and for business support payments to be sped-up.
- **7 Sept HerCanberra:** *Want to support a local businesswoman? How about nominating them for a CWB Award?* President of Canberra Women in Business, Sheena Ireland, highlights opportunity to showcase leading female entrepreneurs with an award nomination.
- **1 Sept ABC:** *COVID-19 Business Support Grant payments to be paid 'within days' as traders grapple with ACT lockdown extension*

Talking points:

- Options to further support industries impacted by border closures were already under active consideration prior to the current lockdown period that started on 12 August 2021.
- Our preparations considered support measures being implemented by other jurisdictions andinvolved ongoing discussions with the Commonwealth Government as well asclose monitoring of the ACT's public health conditions relative to likely impacts on local businesses.
- To support local small businesses and local jobs, this Government has organised a range of supports, including specific schemes for small businesses facing a significant loss in revenue due to the current lockdown:
- **COVID-19 Business Support Grant:** jointly funded by the ACT and the Commonwealth Governments. Grant amounts have been increased following the lockdown extension**:**

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- **Employing businesses will receive an additional $10,000 initially with larger businesses having access to up to $30,000 in one-off payments** ; and
- **An additional $3,750 for non-employing businesses**.
- **As of 15 September 2021 more than $21.8 million in grants had been approved for payment to around 1,1325 businesses.**
- Of the applications that have been submitted:
  - Over 1,100 have been approved;
  - Over 2,300 require further information;
  - Over 2,200 have been partially assessed and are awaiting further financial assessment; and
  - The remainder are in the early stages of the assessment process.

- **Additional payments of up to $20,000 will also be available for businesses in the tourism, accommodation provider, arts, events and hospitality industries**
- **COVID-19 Small Business Hardship Scheme:** credits for payroll tax, utility charges, rates and other selected fees and charges up to a maximum of $10,000 (GST inclusive) per ABN. Applications for this scheme open in October.

During this lockdown, the Commonwealth Government's **COVID-19 Disaster Payment** is available for employees who are unable to earn an income.

Commercial tenancy support measures COVID-19 Commercial Tenancy Support Measures FAQs - Business Hub (act.gov.au) have also been implemented in place to help commercial tenants and landlords impacted by the lockdown:

- A new commercial leases declaration provides protections for commercial tenants facing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- To help commercial landlords who provide at least one month of rent relief to significantly affected tenants, the ACT Government will provide a credit on their commercial rates, depending on whether they have applied for assistance through the COVID-19 Small Business Hardship Scheme; and
- the COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner has been reinstated to connect businesses with relevant areas of government to access information on commercial tenancy measures and financial assistance, including referring to a free acreddited mediation service for complex disputes which cannot be resolved without mediation.

Other Business Support initiatives that we have provided include:

- We've offered a range of financial supports to businesses over the course of the pandemic, to sectors particularly hit by the pandemic and lockdowns including:
- the **Small Tourism Operator COVID Recovery Program** providing grants of up to $15,000
- the **Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator Support Program** providing grants of up to $75,000.
- More broadly, businesses have been providedrates relief, payroll tax waivers and deferrals, stamp duty relief and land tax credit.
- We have also waived licence fees for food business registration, outdoor dining, and liquor licensing.
- **Canberra Business Advice and Support Service:** the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service is extended until March 2022, giving businesses up to four hours free access to expert advice on a range of topics. Businesses which accessed four hours of free expert advice prior to 12 August 2021 are able to access up to a further four hours in light of the current lockdown.
- **The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Support Program** supports Canberra based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Businesses in accessing a range of resources, as well as connecting them directly to business assistance initiatives to help them develop and grow. The program, delivered by Yerra Pty Ltd, finished on 2 September 2021 and options for further targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses are currently being explored by ACT Government.
- **CBR Innovation Network (CBRIN)**: In June 2020, the ACT Government provided $607,000 to CBRIN to deliver support to business and academia and drive economic recovery. This funding supported 17 businesses through two COVID-19 specific streams of the Innovation Connect grant program and fully subsidised scholarships for 50 entrepeneurs to CBRIN's Idea to Impact Program. Representation in the Idea to Impact Program included 52 per cent women and 16 per cent youth (25 or younger).
- The 2020-21 Jobs and Economic Recovery round of the **Priority Investment Program** provided $1.82 million to four projects in the sectors of advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, screen industry and building and construction.. On 23 June 2021, the Chief Minister announced funding of $650,000 to Liquid Instruments to collaborate with the ANU and UNSW Canberrra in developing the company's products and establish advanced manufacturing capability in Canberra. On 12 August 2021, the Chief Minister also announced funding of $389,400 to the Academy of Interactive Entertainment to establish a Virtual Production Studio, a capability that will enhance the local screen industry capability, attract more productions to Canberra and upskill screen practitioners with virtual production. Announcements for the two remaining projects will be made in due course.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Key Information

[*Key Statistics are in the Attached Chief Minister's Business Support Grants QTB*]

- **Rates relief:** In 2020-21, average rates for commercial properties with an average unimproved value of $2m or less did not increase.
- **Rent reduction support:** Landlords of commercial properties with an average unimproved value of $2m or less, with tenants who had been directly impacted by COVID-19, could apply for rent reduction support if they reduced rent for their tenants for at least one month between 1 August and 30 September.
- **Payroll tax waivers/exemptions:** Have been available for businesses unable to trade or only operate on a very limited basis, due to ACT Government health-related restrictions, on wages paid between September 2020 and June 2021. Prior to this, a six-month payroll tax waiver on wages paid from March to August 2020 had been provided to businesses directly impacted by National Cabinet's 'prohibited activities and venues' list.
- **Payroll tax deferrals:** ACT based businesses that have an Australia-wide wage bill up to $10m can defer their 2020-21 payroll tax, interest free, until 1 July 2022.
- **Construction** firms could defer their payroll tax liability for six months from April until September 2020.
- **Stamp duty relief:** The ACT Government offered concessions for contracts exchanged between 4 June 2020 and 30 June 2021. There is no stamp duty for single residential dwelling blocks; no stamp duty on off-the plan units up to $500,000; and an $11,400 reduction in stamp duty for off-the-plan units between $500,000 and $750,000.
- **Food business registration, outdoor dining, and liquor licensing fee waivers:** Food businesses which have prepaid their license will automatically have it extended for an additional 12 months, until 31 March 2022. General licensees received an additional 12 month waiver until 30 June 2022. Application fees for obtaining commercial liquor permits and amending these permits were waived for 12 months from 25 March 2020 to 24 March 2021, where businesses could provide takeaway sales. To further support hospitality businesses impacted by interstate lockdowns this measure has been reintroduced from 1 July 2021.
- **Hire Car and charter bus registration fee waiver:** This waiver includes 12 months registration fee for the vehicle, cost of the third party insurance and national heavy vehicle fees (if required). This waiver has been offered on all active vehicle registrations, any new registrations between 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020, and cancelled or expired vehicle registrations for hire cars and charter buses.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Background Information

- Income support for individuals is available through the Commonwealth's COVID-19 Disaster Recovery Payments.
- For sole traders and business owners, receipt of ACT business support measures may impact on their eligibility for Disaster Recovery Payments. Prospective applicants should consider which option is best for them.
- The Commonwealth's co-contribution to the Business Support Grants was dependent on the Commonwealth Chief Health Officer declaration of the ACT as a COVID Hotspot. It is anticipated that any further Commonwealth contribution towards support measures would be contingent on this declaration being continued.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/2987

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

ISSUE: What has happened with Choose CBR?

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION **11**

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ACT Government

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

KEY POINTS

- A spot checking process is nearing completion. Over 5% of businesses who participated in the scheme have been asked to provide evidence of transactions which involved redemption of ChooseCBR discounts.
    - These businesses were selected based either on the number of transactions or patterns of redemptions identified following analysis of redemption data. A number of businesses were also randomly selected.
- From the evidence provided by these businesses, the vast majority were compliant the scheme terms and conditions. A very small number of businesses identified used the vouchers in a way that was not consistent with the scheme terms and conditions. These rare instances used towards alcohol purchases, showed voucher redemption occurring after the transaction took place or recorded transaction values below qualifying spend.
    - In most instances, there was no obvious pattern, or the occurrence was rare and appeared to neither limit the program's objectives nor indicate purposeful redemption of vouchers for financial gain.
    - In limited instances, an obvious pattern was identified. For example, alcohol being discounted. Additionally, a pattern was identified that may indicate breach of the terms and conditions by a customer, whereby one customer may have signed up multiple times.
- An external review of the program is also underway and will be tabled in the Assembly by the last sitting day of the year.
- Choose CBR closed just after 8am on Saturday 19 June 2021, with the full $2 million value of vouchers being redeemed.
- After the trial we heard from customers and businesses that we needed to make the discounts more attractive to customers to promote uptake, and drive much-needed stimulus into local businesses. We took this feedback on board and made a number of changes, including increasing the daily voucher amounts per customer from $40 to $80.
- The $2 million ChooseCBR scheme resulted in over $5.1 million being spent in ACT businesses since it was launched on 9 June. This includes just over $4 million being spent on 18-19 June, which was a split of the remaining ChooseCBR funding, and customers own spending.

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- The key statistics are:
    - Total value of vouchers redeemed: $2,028,370*
      ** includes the vouchers redeemed manually. All payments to merchants have been made.*
    - Total vouchers redeemed: 59,742
    - Number of businesses that redeemed vouchers: 797
    - Number of customers that redeemed vouchers: 30,051
    - Total value of transactions involving vouchers: $5,179,162*
      ** does not include the remaining vouchers to be redeemed manually*
      Multiplier: 2.6
    - Industry breakdown (by % of total value of vouchers):

Top six business types for voucher redemption	% Total Value
Food retailing (eg. grocers and fresh meat, fish and poultry retailing)	37.1
Cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services	25.9
Recreational goods retailing (eg sport and camping equipment, toys, newspaper and book retailers)	7.6
Pharmaceutical, cosmetic and toiletry goods retailing	6.2
Personal services	5.8
Clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing	3.7

EXTERNAL REVIEW

- An external review of the program is underway and will be tabled in the Assembly by the last sitting day of the year.
- The review will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration of the ChooseCBR stimulus program. It will consider a range of matters, including technical issues, risk management, communications and promotion and lessons learnt from the Trial.

Who is conducting the review?

- The review is being undertaken by David Butler. Mr Butler has significant experience as a Chief Executive and Senior Executive, including with the Australian Taxation Office and the OECD.

How much will the review cost?

- $23,750 inclusive of GST.

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CHECKING OF PURCHASE PATTERNS

How do you know that vouchers were not misused?

- By design customers were able to access three vouchers per day and not able use more than one per business. Customers also had to submit a unique mobile phone number to register and confirm it by submitting a One Time Password.
- Under the Terms and Conditions businesses are required to keep proof of transactions to allow for checking.
- What we've seen is that Canberrans have shown a huge willingness to support and shop local by participating in ChooseCBR.
- We have received assurances from the vendor that the system has maintained an accurate record of vouchers redeemed and dollars expended.
- The ACT Government continues to undertake a checking process, which included looking into some reports of misuse. It is inappropriate to comment further on these reports until the checking process is concluded.
- The spot checking process was paused as a result of the current lockdown.
- A final follow up, to conclude the checking process, of the small remaining number of businesses who have not at this stage responded will resume at an appropriate time, once the current focus of providing support to businesses during the lockdown allows.
- We will consider further actions in relation any business who ultimately does not respond if and when we reach that stage.
- Any specific allegations of misuse should be reported to the ACT Government so they can be checked.

How does the checking process work?

- The ACT Government's spot-checking process for ChooseCBR is expected to be concluded in the coming days. Through this process, a selection of businesses have been asked to provide evidence of transactions where ChooseCBR vouchers were redeemed.
- As per the Terms and Conditions, businesses are required to keep proof of transactions for government checks. Businesses must be able to show the total sale value, the value of the ChooseCBR discount applied, and the date of transaction.
- As part of routine checks businesses are asked for proof of transactions. The information is assessed to determine if it supports the expenditure seen in the system.
- After the scheme closed, redemption activity was checked to see if there were indications of irregular spending patterns. Over 5% of participating businesses have

been asked to provide evidence of these transactions and to explain redemption patterns. Around 80% of those have responded to requests, and less than 20% have not.

- These businesses have been selected on the basis of those redeeming the highest value or volume of vouchers. Businesses with public reports of potential scheme misuse were also identified for spot checking. A number of businesses were selected randomly (using a random number generator for businesses which had transacted at least 20 vouchers).
- Merchants identified were asked to provide receipts for ten sample transactions. Most businesses provided receipts within the seven day period requested. Follow-up phone calls and emails were made to businesses who did not respond.
- Unfortunatly a small number of merchants have not responded to the requests to provide proof of the sample transactions.
- A final follow up of this small number of businesses who have not at this stage responded will conclude the spot checking process.
- Final follow up with these businesses will only be done at an appropriate time, once the current focus of providing support to businesses during the lockdown allows.
- We will consider further actions in relation any business who ultimately does not respond if and when we reach that stage

Were any issues detected in last year's trial?

- Thirty-three (33) businesses who participated in the trial were asked to provide further information about their transactions. It was found that generally there was good compliance with the program Terms and Conditions.
- One pattern of questionable transactions was identified across three merchants. The merchants were provided an opportunity to explain their transaction patterns and were not able to do so satisfactorily. The merchants were removed from the program before the full rollout.

PROGRAM DESIGN

What were the changes since the trial last year?

- The key features of the program were (compared to the trial):
    - removing the requirement for eligible businesses to have received JobKeeper;
    - increasing the voucher amounts to $10, $20 and $50 per day;
    - increasing the discount from 25% to 50%; and

  - providing more resources for businesses to make the most of the program including a Business Toolkit and increased marketing and promotion of the program.

- These changes were made following consultation with businesses and industry peak bodies.

Why was the program tiered, rather than a set value voucher (per NSW scheme)

- There was a broader range of businesses eligible to participate in ChooseCBR than the NSW scheme.
- Consumers in the NSW scheme only get one lot of four $25 vouchers. The greater flexibility with ChooseCBR ensured economic stimulus was applied across a greater range of business in the ACT.
- This allowed businesses to up-sell, gave customers more flexibility and provided a range of options for different business types.

What was the scope of eligible businesses

- ChooseCBR was conceived primarily as a support measure for certain industries impacted by COVID-19 and the associated health restrictions.
- It was also, by nature, a scheme for businesses which would benefit from increased numbers of relatively small discretionary spends. This is why food and accommodation, retail, arts and recreation and personal services businesses were selected for the program.
- Any business which operates in the ACT, has less than $10 million turnover per ABN and is in the hospitality, retail, accommodation, personal services or arts and recreation sectors (as per ANZSIC code) was eligible for ChooseCBR.
- Following the trial, we consulted with businesses and made the decision to remove the JobKeeper eligibility criterion to allow more businesses to participate.
- Many franchises are small businesses and run by small business owners who would face similar challenges to independent small businesses. They also employ Canberrans.
- The great thing about ChooseCBR is that there were hundreds of local businesses participating across a range of sectors and regions, and you could choose where to spend your vouchers

Could individuals have registered more than once?

- Customers could access three vouchers per day and could not use more than one voucher per business. When they registered, customers needed to submit a unique mobile phone number and confirm it by submitting a 'one time' password.
- It is possible that individuals could have registered more than once if they were able to access more than one mobile phone number, but we are unable to verify this.
- It is important to note that the Choose CBR scheme was designed to support businesses and the scheme saw significant expenditure at businesses across the ACT.

What was the 'double your voucher value' promotion the government had planned? Why was this abandoned?

- During the planning stages for the full rollout, the government considered amplifying the program over the June long weekend to provide greater value vouchers for customers.
- The government looked into this option and consulted stakeholders about whether it should be considered, in addition to the increase in voucher values.
- Implementing the 'double your voucher value' promotion may have had an impact on the program's marketing and added complexity to the scheme. Therefore, the decision was made not to proceed with the double voucher promotion.

What will happen to the Business Directory?

- We were pleased to receive positive feedback regarding the business directory that displayed the businesses participating in ChooseCBR.
- We are currently exploring options to see how this resource, or something similar, could be maintained in future.

BUSINESS ACTIVITY

How many businesses redeemed vouchers?

At least 1 voucher:	797
10 or more:	619
50 or more:	267
100 or more:	133
500 or more:	19

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What were the businesses that redeemed the most vouchers?

- The most popular business types for voucher redemptions were for grocers, pharmacies, restaurants and personal services.
- The business that redeemed the most vouchers was in Gungahlin. This business redeemed 3.3% of all vouchers.

WHY WEBSITE WAS CHOSEN

- ChooseCBR was based on the My Darwin system which had been commissioned and used by the City of Darwin Council. It was assessed as being able to be quickly adapted and rolled out to support businesses in Canberra and encourage people to shop locally at a critical time during the economic recovery from COVID.
- When options for a discount voucher business support scheme were being explored, there were no comparable schemes being run in other states and territories. While some were under development and were launched at around the same time, these schemes mostly targeted tourism and did not cover the breadth of businesses able to access the Choose CBR Scheme.
- The other option, to build a system from the ground up, would have taken much longer, and cost more relative to the size of the program. At the time, the priority was to support ACT businesses, so the decision was made to proceed with what became Choose CBR.

ADMINISTRATION, IT AND MARKETING COSTS

- In total $203,000 was allocated for the trial and full rollout of $2.5 million in vouchers including one off establishment of the program, system and hosting capacity upgrades, supports and information for businesses and consumers, and promotional material.
- Given the issues experienced with the system when launched 9 June 2021, additional developer hours and server capacity was procured to resolve the technical issues.
- On the other hand, marketing activities were cancelled due to the overwhelming popularity of the system.
- The final expenditure on administration costs is currently being compiled.

TECHNICAL ISSUES WITH THE FULL ROLL OUT

What happened?

- The system enabled customers to register and access vouchers and for businesses to redeem vouchers. The large volume of users trying to register and redeem vouchers at the same time caused the system to slow and eventually crash as the querying process

could not keep up with the volume of transactions in the system during peak periods last week.

- The technical issues were determined to be performance issues caused by the way the application logic was communicating with the database.

How were the issues diagnosed?

- They were diagnosed once we took the system offline and were able to fully analyse the situation.
- This analysis of the system performing under load in a simulated environment identified the areas where the application logic was causing performance issues.

What fixes were applied?

- We took the time to work with our developer partners to find solutions, test them, and implement them.
- Most of the fixes involved changes to database tables and application logic to improve the efficiency of the activities.

How do the technical issues this time differ from the trial?

- The issues experienced as part of the trial were found to be caused by capacity issues, which were rectified when we purchased additional server capacity. They are not the same issues that caused the problems last week.

When were the technical issues first experienced during the full rollout?

- The first issues experienced were on Tuesday afternoon just after 1pm, 8 June following the distribution of an email to customers resulting in many customers logging on in preparation for the launch. The vendor increased the server capacity in line with the contingency prepared for by the ACT Government for the full rollout.
- The decision was made to take the site offline for a very short window just before 5pm to carry out this work.

When was it identified that the performance issues being experienced were not due to server capacity?

- The intermittent issues continued following the launch but with different symptoms. Each h time attempts were made to resolve issues and stabilise the system, including by scaling up server capacity even further. Over Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 June it became apparent that server capacity and the IT infrastructure were not the cause of the performance issues. As a result, the hypothesis was that the issues were caused by

the application logic itself and the ACT Government made the decision to take the site down on Thursday 10 June to further investigate, diagnose, implement solutions and test.

What was the thinking behind taking the system offline?

- We initially made the decision to pause the website for maintenance until 7am last Friday 11 June. We carried out further work to improve the site's performance and hoped this would resolve all issues.
- After working Thursday afternoon and evening on the system, it became clear we required more time to investigate the issues.
- We were concerned about the impact on businesses and customers of not having a fully operational system.
- Out of an abundance of caution—and so as to not cause further disruption and uncertainty—we made the decision take the system offline for at least seven days to further investigate the issues.
- Once we took the system offline, we were able to fully analyse the situation, and became clear that the issue related to the architecture of the system and how the application logic was communicating with the database.
- Analysis of the system performing under load in a simulated environment identified the areas where the application logic was causing performance issues.
- We took the time to work with our developer partners to find solutions, test them, and implement them – and the system successfully came back on line at 7am Friday 18 June.

TESTING AND ASSURANCES

What testing was done during the trial and before the full rollout?

- Before the full rollout all reasonable testing was carried out on the site. Tests included a suite of functional testing including account registration, voucher redemption and feedback submission.
- Part of last year's trial included testing for system performance. Based on an analysis of performance during the trial, significant additional server capacity was acquired to meet the expected higher demand during the full rollout.
- However, the issue that resulted in the website being suspended for maintenance is a separate issue, related to handling of the large volume of transactions that were not seen in the trial.

What assurances did you and the Directorate seek and receive about the website prior to the full rollout and why were you confident the website would work?

- We had the experience of the trial where the system appeared to perform well. The issues that were identified related to server capacity, as a result the ACT Government purchased considerable additional capacity for the full rollout and had full expectations that the system would perform as it did during the trial.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The ACT scheme is closely modelled on the MyDarwin initiative that has been implemented in the City of Darwin and is supported by a similar ICT system.
- Strong uptake when the scheme was initially launched caused some technical issues which required the system to be suspended. The issues were resolved over the course of a week, with the scheme successfully relaunched on 18 June 2021.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	12/09/2021	
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