

### **5.3. SAFE PLACES EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FUNDING AGREEMENT**

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Council resolves to:**

- 1. Enter into a funding agreement with the Australian Government under the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant to construct emergency accommodation in the Douglas Shire;**
- 2. Enter into a Head Lease Arrangement with domestic violence service provider to manage and maintain the buildings for a period of 15 years;**
- 3. Commit the property to operating as emergency or crisis accommodation for a minimum of 15 years; and**
- 4. Delegate authority under Section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to administer the above matters.**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant from the Australian Government Department of Social Services awarded Douglas Shire Council \$760,400.00 (GST Exc) for capital works funding for a domestic violence facility. Under the terms of the funding agreement Council is required to commit the property to operating as emergency or crisis accommodation for at least 15 years.

This report seeks Council's acceptance of the funding offer and approval of the required commitment to operate as an emergency or crisis accommodation for at least 15 years.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Douglas Shire has one of Queensland's highest rates of reported domestic and family violence yet has no crisis or supported accommodation service. The current practice of referring women to refuges in Cairns or further afield necessitates them leaving family, friends, jobs and schools in order to receive help, which is ineffective and hinders recovery.

Council has been working with Queensland Police Service and local community service providers to advocate for the establishment of a domestic violence accommodation facility in the region since 2017.

Council adopted a Functional Brief 20 June 2017. The Council Resolution and Full Report may be viewed at [Ordinary Council Meeting - 20 June 2017 - Douglas Shire Council](#).

Council adopted a Supported Accommodation Operational Model Proposal on 20 August 2019. The Council Resolution and Full Report may be viewed at [Ordinary Council Meeting - 20 August 2019 - Douglas Shire Council](#).

The Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant from the Australian Government Department of Social Services was open until 14 February 2020 and provided an opportunity to apply for capital works funding for a domestic violence facility. Council and local community organisations have been advocating for a facility since 2017.

At the Ordinary Council Meeting of 11 February 2020, Council resolved to support an application for the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant to build two self-contained units for the purpose of providing a domestic violence crisis accommodation facility in line with the Operational Model adopted by Council in August 2019.

Council also resolved to commit a suitable block of land in Mossman for the facility should the grant application be successful, and delegate authority under section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to initiate proceedings in matters related to the identification and availability of an appropriate property.

The Council Resolution and Full Report may be viewed at [https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/council\\_meetings/meeting\\_agendas/20200211-Ordinary-Meeting-Confirmed-Minutes.pdf](https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/council_meetings/meeting_agendas/20200211-Ordinary-Meeting-Confirmed-Minutes.pdf) and [https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/council\\_meetings/meeting\\_agendas/5.2-Safe-Places-Emergency-Accommodation-Program-Grant-Application.pdf](https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/council_meetings/meeting_agendas/5.2-Safe-Places-Emergency-Accommodation-Program-Grant-Application.pdf).

While Council did not own any suitable vacant blocks of land at the time of the grant application, preliminary investigations identified several appropriate properties, owned privately or by the State Government.

On advice the funding was successful Council Officers further investigated land options in consultation with key stakeholders.

Council approved the purchase of a block of land at the Ordinary Meeting of 24 November 2020 in a closed session due to the confidential nature of the matter. Settlement of the vacant land will take place on 27 January 2021

## COMMENT

The Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant from the Department of Social Services will fund the capital works required to construct a facility.

The grant does not fund operational costs so Council officers have been working with service providers to formalise partnerships to manage the facility in accordance with the preferred model.

Once built, Council intends to implement a lease arrangement with the domestic violence service provider to manage and maintain the building.

## PROPOSAL

The proposal is for Council to:

1. Enter into a funding agreement with the Australian Government under the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Grant to construct emergency accommodation in the Douglas Shire;

2. Enter into a Head Lease Arrangement with domestic violence service provider to manage and maintain the buildings for a period of 15 years;
3. Commit the property to operating as emergency or crisis accommodation for a minimum of 15 years; and
4. Delegate authority under Section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to administer the above matters.

## FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The purchase of the block of land was approved at the Ordinary Meeting 24 November 2020 in a closed session.

The grant will fund construction costs but not operational costs. Council officers are working to formalise partnerships with service providers to manage the facility in accordance with the preferred domestic violence facility model and enter into a head lease to manage and maintain the building.

While Douglas Shire Council will have ownership of the property, the funding agreement has a repayment clause in the event the property does not continue to operate as emergency or crisis accommodation for a minimum of 15 years.

## RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Project risks will be mitigated through the systematic application of internal project management systems. Project management will be the responsibility of a Council Officer, supported by officers from finance, property and procurement.

The project manager will be responsible for ensuring all conditions of the funding agreement are met. As the funding agreement has a repayment clause in the event the property does not continue to operate as emergency or crisis accommodation for a minimum of 15 years, Council ownership of the property and this resolution will mitigate this risk.

A major risk and critical component of this project will be securing the services of an external provider to manage the domestic violence service and property. This risk will be mitigated by continuing to partner with Queensland Police Service and local service providers to advocate to government, non-government and philanthropic funding bodies for continued funding for the service delivery aspects of the program.

## SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

**Economic:** According to a KPMG Report prepared for the Department of Social Services in May 2016, the cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was estimated to be \$22 billion in 2015-16.

**Environmental:** Providing resources locally will reduce travelling to other regions to access accommodation and support services.

**Social:** The implications of violence can include long term social, health, psychological, financial and economic damage. (KPMG Report 2016). The Douglas Shire community has been advocating for a crisis or emergency accommodation service to keep women and their children in the community while they rebuild their life skills after escaping domestic and family violence.

## CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

### Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

#### Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

Douglas Shire Council embraces the diversity of our communities and values the contribution that all people make to the Shire. We recognise that it is a core strength of the region. We acknowledge our past so that it may guide us in the future. We recognise the wrongs done to our Indigenous community and we actively seek to reconcile so that we may all benefit from and enjoy our Shire. We acknowledge early European settlers who forged an agricultural base for our economy and we welcome all new arrivals as part of our broader community.

*Goal 3 - We will develop programs that promote health, well-being and safety in the community.*

#### Theme 4 - Inclusive Engagement, Planning and Partnerships

In delivering for our communities, economy and environment, Douglas Shire will ensure open and transparent engagement and communication. We will develop robust strategic plans and we will partner with our community and key stakeholders.

*Goal 3 - We will recognise the critical role that our partners play in planning and delivering vital programs and services.*

## COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

## CONSULTATION

**Internal:** Property Services, Project Office, Planning Services, Councillors

**External:** Real Estate Agents, Queensland Police Service, local community domestic violence service providers.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In developing the Domestic and Family Violence Refuge Functional Brief adopted by Council at the 20 June 2017 Ordinary Meeting extensive community engagement had taken place. Input was obtained from Queensland Police Service and representatives of government and non-government agencies responding to domestic and family violence in the Douglas Shire.

Council's Project Working Group has engaged with services providers to discuss shortlisted vacant land prior to purchase, along with floor plans for accommodation. Council officers will continue to engage with stakeholders to formalise partnerships in running the facility after construction.

## ATTACHMENTS

Nil