

5.4. DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE REFUGE SIX MONTH UPDATE

REPORT AUTHOR Lisa Golding, Community & Economic Development Officer
MANAGER Gary Kerr, Executive Officer
DEPARTMENT CEO Unit - Connecting Communities

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Notes the status report on advocacy to secure funding for a Domestic and Family Violence Refuge located in the Douglas Shire; and**
- 2. Resolves to continue to advocate to State and Federal governments for a facility as described in the functional brief adopted by Council.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increased State Government funding for domestic and family violence services in our region shows that the need which compelled Council to become a strong advocate on this issue has not abated. Council has collaborated with local community organisations and police to develop a functional brief to establish current support service gaps and identify a facility model to best address the absence of a crisis or supported accommodation facility in the Douglas Shire. Data from police and community organisations reinforce the continued need for a supported accommodation service to assist victims and their children escaping domestic and family violence in our region.

Council continues to collaborate with service providers to develop a business plan with which to further advocate to Federal and State governments for the funding required to develop and service a domestic and family violence refuge as detailed in the functional brief. The report details developments and advocacy efforts from December 2017 to May 2018.

BACKGROUND

According to police statistics, the Douglas Shire continues to have one of Queensland's highest rates of reported domestic and family violence. The region also has high levels of vulnerable populations with barriers to accessing existing support services: small 'rural and remote' population centres, a lack of affordable public transport, a lack of affordable housing and no crisis accommodation.

The absence of a local facility for women and their children escaping violence necessitates police and service providers referring victims to agencies in Cairns, where demand for supported accommodation consistently outstrips supply, or to temporary, unsupported placement in motels. This response is inadequate and ineffectual. Moving to Cairns to access assistance requires victims to leave the support of family and friends, leave their jobs and requires their children to change schools, increasing upheaval and instability. Without safe and secure accommodation many victims of domestic and family violence will return to their abusers.

In response to this evidenced need, Council developed a functional brief detailing the model of refuge best suited to the Douglas Shire in terms of financial outlay and client outcomes, in collaboration with Queensland Police, local government and non-government service providers, regional specialist domestic violence services and study of Australian and international best practice domestic and family violence accommodation responses.

At the Ordinary Council Meeting on 20 June 2017 it was resolved:

"That Council:

1. Notes the extensive consultation and community support underpinning the recommendations in this Domestic and Family Violence Refuge Functional Brief; and
2. Adopts the Brief which sets out a proposal for the facility and operational requirements suitable for supported accommodation needed to fill a gap in services for vulnerable members of the Douglas Shire; and
3. Resolves to use this document to advocate to State and Federal governments for a purpose built Domestic and Family Violence Refuge for Douglas Shire as recommended therein."

COMMENT

Pursuant to the Council Resolution of 20 June, an initiative was included in Council's Operational Plan 2017-18: 1.2.1 Advocate Federal and State governments for funding to establish a domestic violence refuge (DFV), with a requirement for a biannual report to Council detailing actions taken in this regard.

Actions and outcomes in advocacy for a DFV refuge in Douglas. December 2017 – May 2018

Workshop with service providers led by Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women held in Mossman on 12 March 2018:

1. Mapped and discussed the services currently available in Douglas including an increase in early intervention family services, potential for a Relationships Australia perpetrator program to be run annually, and increased capacity of Mossman Elders Justice Group to run services for perpetrators
2. Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women advised that "even though there has been a heavy investment of DFV funding over the past few years, there is no current funding available for a women's shelter."
3. Department also confirmed that they are aware of "current service gaps" and "data evidencing high rates of DFV"
4. Reiterated previous issues: specialist DFV services and Home Security Safety Upgrade funding available as outreach from Cairns, if those services have the capacity to provide.

Meetings held with:

1. New coordinators and managers of local community organisations and new members of Community Agency Network
 - a. Very keen to be involved in advocating for such a service and working with the service once established to provide supported accommodation to victims and their children

Increased funding from Queensland Government for domestic and family violence services:

1. Funding has been awarded to Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service for Mossman-based specialist DFV adult and child counselling and court support services
2. 24 extra police specialists in DFV as "domestic and family violence coordinators" to provide specialist education and training to operational officers and assist

government and Non – Government Organisations to better address DFV. Two of these positions will be based in Cairns

3. DFV shelter opened in Coen. Ministerial Champion for Coen, State Development Minister Cameron Dick said "One of the barriers preventing people from seeking help is not having a safe place to go. Shelters such as this provide a secure haven for victims and help break the cycle of violence".
4. Funding commitment for three new DFV shelters: in The Gold Coast, Caboolture and Roma

Media opportunities:

1. Council media release 20 December 2017: Mayor calls on new Minister to help tackle Domestic Violence problem
2. Council media comments 16 March 2018: Council welcomes the State Government funding to improve domestic violence services in Mossman and Port Douglas.

PROPOSAL

Council will continue to advocate to State and Federal governments for support and funding for a Domestic and Family Violence Refuge as per the functional brief, to be located in the Douglas Shire to assist women and their children escaping violence.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no resource implications for Council arising from this brief. Council's role in this project is to advocate for the delivery of a suitable accommodation facility to fill identified gaps in services.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There is no risk to Council emanating from this report but, with one Australian woman killed by her current or former partner every week, the risks to the community of not providing best practice responses to women and their children escaping from domestic and family violence are greater than the risks associated with installing a domestic violence refuge in the shire.

The operational risks associated with a refuge for women and their children escaping violence will be ameliorated through incorporating best practice measures throughout the design and implementation phases of the facility and service.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Domestic and family violence is estimated to cost Queensland \$3 billion a year. Facilitating the provision of best practice services to assist vulnerable residents will lessen this impact on the community.

Environmental: Providing resources locally will require less travel from people needing to access accommodation and support services from other regions.

Social: The social implications of domestic and family violence include negative psychological and behavioural, health and socio-economic outcomes, and impact upon victims, perpetrators, their children and the wider community. Ensuring best practice support services provide an environment that helps victims break free of a cycle of violence contributes to greater wellbeing for victims and the community.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

1.2.1 - Advocate for state and federally funded services in identified areas of need.

1.3.1 - Take a proactive role in supporting the provision of improved facilities and services directed at assisting and caring for vulnerable groups in our communities.

Operational Plan 2017-2018 Actions:

1.2.1 - Advocate Federal and State governments for funding to establish a domestic violence refuge

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:

Advocate Supporting communities and groups by advocating for certain actions from other organisations (usually other levels of government)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As this project scope is to advocate to State and Federal governments, community engagement has not been included in this stage.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil