

5.4. DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE REFUGE SIX MONTH UPDATE

REPORT AUTHOR	Lisa Golding, Community & Economic Development Officer
EXECUTIVE OFFICER	Gary Kerr
DEPARTMENT	CEO Unit - Connected 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**
- 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

Strong evidence for the need for a domestic and family violence refuge to be located in the Douglas Shire compelled Council to collaborate with local community organisations and police to develop a functional brief to set out the gaps in current support service delivery to victims and their children escaping domestic and family violence, and to identify the model of facility required to best address the absence of a supported accommodation facility in Douglas.

Council adopted the Functional Brief and resolved to advocate to Federal and State governments for the funding required to build and service a Domestic and Family Violence refuge as detailed in the brief. This report details the efforts made from June to November 2017.

BACKGROUND

The Douglas Shire has one of Queensland's highest rates of reported domestic and family violence with the region serviced by Mossman Police ranked 9th in 2016-17 for percentage of the population applying for DFV applications. The region also has a high proportion of the population vulnerable to barriers to accessing support services. Douglas consists of small 'rural and remote' population centres, has a lack of affordable public transport, affordable housing and no crisis accommodation.

The lack of a local facility for women and their children necessitates that police and community services respond to incidents of domestic and family violence by referring victims to agencies in Cairns, where demand for supported accommodation consistently outstrips supply, or to temporary placement in unsupported accommodation in motels. This response is inadequate and ineffectual. Moving to Cairns to access help 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 an 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, 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. June – November 2017

Functional brief presented to:

1. Members of the Community Agency Network: 20 July
2. White Ribbon Queensland Committee National Board of Directors Chairman Chiu-Hing Chan
3. Director General of Department of Justice and Attorney-General David Mackie: 8 November.

Meetings held with:

1. The Honorable Shannon Fentiman, Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence: 10 July
 - a. Commitment that the Domestic Violence High Risk Team to be funded for Cairns in 2018 would include working with families in Douglas
 - b. The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) was advised to request a meeting with Douglas stakeholders to discuss local responses to DFV
2. Douglas community service organisations and police, with Regional Director of Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Tracey Harding, and relevant government-funded agencies. 29 October.
 - a. Discussion with DCCSDS, Department of Housing and Public Works, Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service, Act for Kids Intensive Family Support, identifying gaps in services
 - i. DFV Counselling for victims
 1. Douglas services are giving unfunded counselling where possible.
 - ii. Counselling for children
 - iii. Accommodation Options
 1. Organisations have to scrounge funding for even emergency accommodation in motels

- b. Commitments from DCCSDS to explore funding options for increased DFV service provision in Douglas (Home Security Safety Upgrades program; Telehealth to deliver counselling); and scrutinise existing funding arrangements
- c. Commitment from Douglas organisations to collect data on the number and type of DFV interactions requiring supported accommodation options, to strengthen further advocacy

Media Opportunities:

1. Council Media Release 20 June: Douglas Shire community unites in urgent call for domestic violence refuge
 - a. Several articles in Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette and The Cairns Post and an invitation to meet with Minister Fentiman
2. Council Media Release 8 November: Mayor calls on Cook candidates to back domestic violence refuge in Douglas Shire
 - a. Media response

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 impost 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