

7.3 ADVOCACY POLICY

Author: *Rebecca Sirianni - Advocacy, Social Policy and Partnership Coordinator*

File No: *C5/21/010*

Attachments: *1. Advocacy Policy*

SUMMARY

The Advocacy Policy (the policy) outlines Mitchell Shire Council's (Council's) approach to advocacy and efforts in working in partnership with the community and local members to influence policy decisions, directions and resourcing assistance by State and Federal Governments and other key stakeholders, to deliver services and assets to our existing and emerging communities.

Its purpose is to clearly define roles and responsibilities across Council with respect to advocacy, along with providing a framework for the identification, development and maintenance of key projects and focus areas.

At its core, the policy places the Advocacy Statement -Mitchell Shire Council aims to create and maintain a healthy, connected and sustainable community at the heart of Council's approach to advocacy. It utilises this to frame Council's efforts through a whole-of-Council approach in order to achieve best-practice advocacy with the aim of better outcomes for the community.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse the Advocacy Policy.

BACKGROUND

The Advocacy Policy (the policy), Attachment 1, outlines Mitchell Shire Council's (Council's) approach to advocacy and efforts in working in partnership with the community and local members to influence policy decisions, directions and resourcing assistance by State and Federal Government and other key stakeholders, to deliver services and assets to our existing and emerging communities.

The Policy directly responds to Key Strategy 1.1 of the Council Plan: establish an Advocacy Strategy that includes key priorities, and clear roles and responsibilities.

The Advocacy Statement, which is the key component of the policy, was developed through workshops with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Executive Leadership

ADVOCACY POLICY (CONT.)

Team (ELT) and Council. The statement is: Mitchell Shire Council aims to create and maintain a healthy, connected and sustainable community.

The Policy outlines ten key principles which will underpin Council's approach to advocacy. Council will advocate:

- 1) Transparently with the community, actively encouraging participation and engagement
- 2) With a focus on the Advocacy Statement
- 3) Consistently with the purpose to achieve our goals and objectives by designing strong and comprehensive messages
- 4) By being consistent and continuous in pursuit of outcomes for all in our community
- 5) By actively, developing and valuing partnerships and relationships with community, governments and other stakeholders
- 6) By understanding the change which we are attempting to achieve and recognising and acknowledging its impact
- 7) In full awareness that advocacy requires trade-offs and a long-term approach, and managing these to ensure the best result for our community and future communities
- 8) By developing an understanding of, and being responsive to the political environment
- 9) Creatively to ensure we are heard and recognised as leaders for our community by employing evidence and narrative
- 10) By prioritising a proactive approach, but also taking advantage of beneficial opportunities when they arise

Endorsement of the Advocacy Policy would support progress towards best practice advocacy with the aim of achieving better outcomes for Mitchell Shire and its residents

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

Advocacy is a key element of the work of Local Government, it is central to Council's role in serving the community. It underpins Council's ability to successfully deliver services, programs and infrastructure which meet the needs of existing and emerging communities. Advocacy requires a whole-of-Council organisational approach. In order to be effective, it is important advocacy is planned, considered and resourced

CONSULTATION

The Advocacy Policy and Statement have been developed through a series of strategic consultations.

This included workshops with SLT, ELT and Council to develop and refine the over-all vision and the Advocacy Statement.

The Advocacy Policy has also been through a series of consultations, and subsequent refinement, with a range of key stakeholders within Council and external to Council including representatives from the National Growth Areas Alliance and the Northern

ADVOCACY POLICY (CONT.)

Councils Alliance, along with an extensive desk-top review of relevant partner materials and advocacy best practice research.

FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The primary financial, resource and asset implications regard the commitment of Officer's time to both the operation of the Advocacy Policy and advocacy activities in general.

Council may be required to procure the services of specialists to add to our advocacy efforts through documentation such as businesses cases and communication material, funding has been allocated in the 2020/2021 budget for such items.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The *Local Government Act 2020* identifies that Councils have a legitimate role in advocating for the needs of the community and municipality.

Part 2 Division 1 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (The Act) states:

(1) The role of Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community.

Part 2 Division 9 outlines:

(b) Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations.

(c) The economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted.

(f) Collaboration with other Councils and governments and statutory bodies is to be sought.

The Advocacy Policy has clear linkages to a range of codes, charters, legislation and Council documents of note:

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
- Council Plan
- Community Engagement Framework
- Life Stages Strategy
- Social Justice Framework
- Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Environmental Policy

The Advocacy Policy directly responds to Key Strategy 1.1 of the Council Plan: establish an Advocacy Strategy that includes key priorities, and clear roles and responsibilities.

ADVOCACY POLICY (CONT.)

RISK IMPLICATIONS

Risk Ranking is determined using [ROHS201-G1- Corporate Risk Matrix](#). Risk is identified as Low, Medium, High or Very High.

Risk	Risk Ranking	Proposed Treatments	Within Existing Resources?
There is a risk that Council's advocacy may be unsuccessful.	Medium	Review the policy and governance structure on a regular basis. Utilise the three tiers of the governance structure to ensure a coordinated whole-of-Council approach. Ensure that advocacy is proactive, but responsive to opportunities.	Treatments would not be greater than the financial implications mentioned in report.
There is a risk that a whole-of-Council approach to advocacy will not be successfully adopted	Low	Careful, strategic implementation of the Advocacy Policy. Clear, consistent internal messaging. Strong support and leadership from ELT and SMT.	Treatments would not be greater than the financial implications mentioned in report

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL)

At its core, through the implementation of the Policy and the Advocacy Statement - Mitchell Shire Council aims to create and maintain a health, connected and sustainable community sustainability is at the heart of Council's approach to advocacy.

CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

The rights protected in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* were considered in preparing this report and it's determined that the subject matter does not raise any human rights issues.

ADVOCACY POLICY (CONT.)

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There are no children and young people implications.

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

Advocacy is central to Council's role in serving the community. Advocacy must be strategic, focused and requires a whole-of-Council organisational approach.

Endorsement of the policy supports progress towards best practice advocacy, it is essential to providing and facilitating an environment that ensures Council's overall approach to advocacy is able to be effective with the aim of achieving better outcomes for Mitchell Shire and its current and future communities.

1.0 PURPOSE

This policy outlines Mitchell Shire Council's (Council's) approach to advocacy and efforts working in partnership with the community to influence policy decisions, directions and resourcing assistance by State and Federal Government and other key stakeholders, to deliver services and assets to our existing and emerging communities. It ensures that Council's advocacy is aligned with Mitchell Shire Council vision for the community, Council Plan and any other relevant strategic documents or policies.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Advocacy – To represent the needs and concerns of the population now and into the future

Advocate – A person or organisation who is supported to represent the needs of the population now and into the future

Audience – The target of an advocate, for whom a message has been designed, this could be community, government or any other stakeholder

Communication – Includes all forms of communication and is more than just written language

Facilitator – Through collaboration and partnerships

Provider – (A) of services; (B) of information, tools, public spaces and facilities

3.0 CONTEXT

Advocacy is a key element of the work of Local Government. It underpins Council's ability to successfully deliver services, programs and infrastructure which meet the needs of existing and emerging communities. Advocacy requires a whole-of-Council organisational approach.

This policy is designed to ensure that Council's advocacy is strategic and aligned with the Council Plan and vision for the community. The policy also supports other policies and strategic documents.

Advocacy is central to Council's role in serving the community. Advocacy provides the community with certainty of voice, ensuring Council can elevate local matters to both a state and federal level. Advocacy must be strategic and focused, and co-ordination across the entire organisation is central to success. Advocacy is a task for everyone in every communication. It encompasses many different elements from direct communication relating to funding through to the broad focus of public education and awareness campaigns. Effective advocacy is proactive, but also responsive to the political environment and any opportunities.

Council has a role in advocating at a number of different levels. Advocacy can occur at local, regional, state and federal levels. There are often synergies and connections between the

levels with Council's role often one of leadership and support. In order to be effective, it is important that advocacy is planned, considered and resourced.

This policy has been developed to clarify the Council's overall approach to advocacy and ensure that it is able to be an effective advocate for the community. Good advocacy is vital in order to ensure that Council is able to support the interests of our existing and emerging communities.

4.0 SCOPE

This policy will apply to Councillors, Council staff, Council contractors or consultants, and Council Volunteers.

5.0 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The Victorian *Local Government Act 2020* identifies that Councils have a legitimate role to play in advocating for the needs of the community and municipality.

Part 2 Division 1 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (The Act) states:

- (1) The role of Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community.

Part 2 Division 9 outlines:

- (b) Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations.
- (c) The economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted.
- (f) Collaboration with other councils and governments and statutory bodies is to be sought.

5.1 Related Documents

This policy has linkages to a range of codes, charters, legislation and Council documents.

6.0 POLICY

6.1 Advocacy Statement

Mitchell Shire Council aims to create and maintain a healthy, connected and sustainable community.

This Advocacy Statement is formulated from three key elements which Council and its officers will have regard to when pursuing advocacy, that the community is:

- *Healthy*
- *Connected*

– *Sustainable*

These have been developed in line with the Council's vision for the community and the Council Plan along with a range of consultations. Together they form an Advocacy Statement.

The Advocacy Statement provides the central focus and consistent point of reference for all of Council's advocacy.

6.2 Principles

Advocacy is supported by a series of principles (in no particular order). Council will advocate:

- 1) Transparently with the community, actively encouraging participation and engagement
- 2) With a focus on the Advocacy Statement
- 3) Consistently with the purpose to achieve our goals and objectives by designing strong and comprehensive messages
- 4) By being consistent and continuous in pursuit of outcomes for all in our community
- 5) By actively, developing and valuing partnerships and relationships with community, governments and other stakeholders
- 6) By understanding the change which we are attempting to achieve and recognising and acknowledging its impact
- 7) In full awareness that advocacy requires trade-offs and a long term approach, and managing these to ensure the best result for our community and future communities
- 8) By developing an understanding of, and being responsive to the political environment
- 9) Creatively to ensure we are heard and recognised as leaders for our community by employing evidence and narrative
- 10) By prioritising a proactive approach, but also taking advantage of beneficial opportunities when they arise

These principles need to be considered in all forms of advocacy by Council and its officers.

6.3 Who is an Advocate?

Advocacy requires a whole-of-Council approach. In order to be effective advocacy needs to engage the correct people as both advocates and audience. This means that the advocate must be the 'right inviter'; this is the person(s) who has the requisite knowledge, authority and tools.

An advocate may be a Councillor, Council Officer, volunteer, community member or any other person(s).

Council's role is to provide and facilitate an environment in which the right people are empowered to be Advocates.

6.4 Implementation

The Senior Management Team (SMT), which includes the Executive Leadership Team, will be responsible for the oversight and co-ordination of the Advocacy Statement (6.1) and

Principles (6.2), and the development of any Focus Areas (6.5.3). The Senior Management Team will be supported in this task, and will report to Council annually.

The role of Council and all Council officers is to progress and pursue advocacy under the guidance of the Advocacy Statement (6.1) and Advocacy Principles (6.2) in accordance with the General Advocacy Practice (6.5).

6.5 General Advocacy Practice

6.5.1 Framing

Advocacy must be focused and aspirational so that decision makers and the broader community generate enthusiasm and motivation for the issue, rather than receive negative messages that focus on the problem. The audience needs to identify with the issue. Therefore, key messages must be clear, consistent, easily understood and relatable. Effective advocacy should be accessible to all, however designed to influence its primary audience. When advocating Council must be open minded while taking calculated risks.

Consideration must be given to the Advocacy Statement (6.1) and the Principles (6.2) from this policy when contributing to advocacy.

6.5.2 Key Elements

Best practice advocacy draws upon two key design elements (in no particular order):

- Evidence and data
- Stories, narrative and real-life grounding

Both of these elements should be used in advocacy in order to ensure overall effectiveness. Advocacy should be designed so that both of these design elements are considered and utilised.

The role of Council staff is to organise the collection, gathering and utilisation of evidence, data and stories.

6.5.3 Focus Areas

Advocacy can be aided through the creation and maintenance of a structured set of focus areas. These can be utilised to ensure there exists a focused, coordinated and proactive approach to advocacy. Whilst these are an important and very useful tool, they are only one of a suite of options which should be considered. The development of any focus areas must consider the Advocacy Statement (6.1) and the Principles (6.2) outlined in this policy.

6.5.3.1 Focus Areas Review

These focus areas should be reviewed annually following the release of both the State and Federal Budgets, or as needed. Any review must consider the Advocacy Statement (6.1) and the Principles (6.2) outlined in this policy.

7.0 REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed three years after its adoption by Council to ascertain its effectiveness by working towards the Purpose (1.0) in supporting Council to work in partnership with our community and local members to influence policy decisions, directions and resourcing assistance by State and Federal Government and other key stakeholders, to deliver services and assets to our existing and emerging communities.

There should also be an annual evaluation of the Council's advocacy, particularly in light of any significant changes in the political environment, overseen by SMT in line with Implementation (6.4).