



Advocacy Policy

Policy Owner	Advocacy and Community Services Directorate Community Strengthening Department Advocacy, Social Policy and Partnerships Team
Adoption Date	17/08/2020
Revision Date	August 2023



Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, those of the Taungurung and Wurundjeri People. We pay our respects to their rich cultures and to elders past and present.

Contact us:

Phone: (03) 5734 6200

Fax: (03) 5734 6222

Email: mitchell@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au

Website: www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au



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 Scope

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

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 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

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).