

2.3 JUNIOR ADVISORY GROUP (CS)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Supports the twelve (12) month trial of a Junior Advisory Group for primary school students as an action of the Child & Young People Friendly City Project; and*
- 2. Appoints Councillors Klisaris, McCluskey, Paterson, Fergeus and Zographos to participate in the Junior Advisory Group in 2019.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Council the establishment of a Junior Advisory Group for primary school students. This will involve primary school children having a consultation with the Project Officer during their Civic and Governance studies to inform and educate on the role and activities of Council.

The expected outcomes for this Advisory Group are:

- Effective consultation by Council with 1000+ children from four (4) local primary schools through their representatives
- Increased education and understanding of the role of Council by primary school children through interaction with Councillors and the Council decision making process
- Opportunities for children from the middle years of childhood to be active citizens and participants in their community

BACKGROUND

Council endorsed the Child and Young People Friendly Cities project as first outlined in the Monash Children, Young People and Family Strategy and Action Plan 2016 – 2017 and further endorsed in the Healthy and Resilient Monash Integrated Plan 2017 – 2021.

The aim of the Child and Young People Friendly Cities Project is to:

1. Liaise with Residents and Council staff to gain an understanding of what makes a child and young people friendly city;
2. Raise awareness of what services Council provides for children and young people;

3. Develop initiatives to address any gaps in meeting the Victorian Charter Criteria for being a Child Friendly City & Community; and
4. Identify areas where we can improve our engagement with children and young people.

The Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) has developed a Framework to assist Councils and organisations to meet the main principles set out as part of the Victorian Charter for creating a Child Friendly City & Community (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION

Following consultation with members of the community including School staff as well as Council staff, one of the early recommendations is a twelve (12) month trial of a Junior Advisory Group initiative. This aligns with one of the main principles of the Victorian Charter – listening and responding to children and young people.

Services to children from birth to 5 years of age are provided by Council through their families. These services include but not limited to Maternal and Child Health, the Immunisation Program, Sleep Settling and Lactation Clinics, Family Day Care, Playgroups, Kindergarten and Child Care and Story time sessions held at libraries.

Young people aged from 10 to 17 actively seek out Council activity via Social Media, word of mouth and school participation programs. This involvement extends to programs such as: Activate, Youth Reference Groups and Youth Ambassadors, the Immunisation Program and other programs facilitated by Monash Youth Services.

However, 5 to 11 year olds which make up 7.2% of our residents, are potentially under represented with only a handful of services available to this sector including Monash Swim School, sporting activities and Council's Libraries. It is expected that this Junior Advisory Group initiative will assist Council to engage with this group and ensure they have an opportunity to become active community participants.

It is planned that two (2) children from each participating school would be selected to sit on the Junior Advisory Group to meet three (3) times per year. A maximum of 8 children would participate at any one time during the trial. These representatives will speak on behalf of their fellow students. The first meeting of the trial year, held in March 2019, will be an educational session with Senior Officers and Teachers. The second two meetings will occur in June and September 2019.

For the June and September meetings, the Junior Advisory Group will meet with Senior Officers to frame their issues/discussion. The following week the

volunteer Councillors will meet with the group in the Council Chamber to discuss any topics raised by the children, support their understanding of how Council works and how the community can be involved. This initiative is part of the Child and Young People Friendly City Project providing the opportunity for children to be active citizens of Monash.

A feedback report will be provided to Council following the evaluation of the success or otherwise of the 2019 trial. With Council's additional approval, if the initiative continues, an invitation will be extended to additional schools with a maximum of fourteen (14) students.

In line with the recently adopted Child Safe Standards Legislation, all adults who interact with children under the age of 18 years, as a volunteer or in a paid capacity, must have a satisfactory, up-to-date Working with Children Check. This legislation is applicable to the Councillors who take up this opportunity, or in fact, any other opportunity in their public role where adult child interaction occurs.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of positive social implications for children in our community that may result from this initiative including:

1. Creating a sense of community – children and young people's opinions and feedback are actively sought by Council developing a strong sense of community, by considering all age demographics;
2. Awareness raising – promoting the range of services available to children and young people within our community; and
3. Education and skills development – The junior advisory group will enhance classroom learning with real life application of local government activity.
4. Promotion of government and its processes which may lead to active citizenship at later life stages.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities has been developed specifically for local governments, organisations and individuals to take action. The Charter is a statement of the principles and actions that underpin the right to be considered *child friendly*.

Recognising the need for increased participation by children in decision making forums and creating child friendly environments, we support the following Principles:

1. Freedom for children to experience environments that consider their needs;
2. Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and wellbeing; and
3. Equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.

CONSULTATION

Residents and children were surveyed by the Child & Young People Friendly City Project Officer regarding "What does being a Child & Young People Friendly City mean to you?"

Based on some of the responses, the children interviewed seemed to have a limited understanding of what a Council does and how it works. This initiative aims to address the knowledge gap as well as providing children with an opportunity to participate in local Council decision making activity and importantly to be heard by Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any additional funding required can be accommodated within the existing budget.

CONCLUSION

The twelve (12) month trial of the Junior Advisory Group will be an opportunity for children to participate with Monash Council and Councillors along with enhancing any Civics and Citizenship learnings offered at school. This initiative will ensure that children, as active citizens, have the opportunities and resources needed to participate in the formation, implementation and evaluation of local policies and strategies.

In addition, by creating this opportunity Council ensures that we actively support the Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities.

Participating Councillors will require a satisfactory Working with Children Check.

A report back to Council will be provided following the evaluation of the 2019 trial.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter