

OFFICERS REPORT**6.1 REFUGEE WELCOME ZONE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

Submitting Councillor: Josh Fergeus

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Commits to becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Council;*
- 2. Allocates an amount of \$5000 in its recurrent budget for the purposes of membership with the Refugee Council of Australia as a Leadership Council, and;*
- 3. Authorises Officers to undertake the necessary actions to fulfil this commitment.*

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

In order to become a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Council, Council needs to commit to payment of an annual membership fee of \$5,000 to the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA).

The financial membership commitment enables Council to be recognised as a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Council, however any initiatives delivered by Council using this title would need to be at Council's own expense. It is likely that additional funds for programs and activities will also be required. In the first instance a budget allocation would be required to upgrade the existing Refugee Welcome Zone signage/banners to publicise Council's move to becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Council. A matching operational budget allocation of \$5000 per year would ensure that any activities are appropriately resourced.

IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES

There are no specific activities or deliverables expected of RWZ Leadership Councils, with the benefits as a Leadership Council being primarily related to greater interaction with and support from RCOA, as well as contributing financially to RCOA.

Council is regularly involved in advocacy activities and initiatives which support refugees and asylum seekers. It is assumed that advocacy as a RWZ Leadership Council would effectively be an extension of this work and therefore no significant additional impact on internal resources is anticipated as a result of support for this Motion.

COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

In 2017 Council adopted *A Healthy & Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021* as the guiding strategic document. This Plan provides context to Council's work in relation to the health and wellbeing of the Monash community, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The City of Monash signed the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration in 2002. A Refugee Welcome Zone is a local government area that has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the

community, upholding their human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

This commitment to welcome refugees sends a positive message throughout the community, raises awareness and highlights the positive work of Councils which are involved in implementing a range of policies, programs and activities to build more inclusive and socially cohesive communities.

Monash Council has a strong commitment to its community, supports cultural diversity and values, and respects the expression of difference. Monash Council has demonstrated significant leadership in the areas of multicultural policy development, service provision and support for culturally and linguistically diverse residents.

Monash Council does not tolerate racial discrimination of any kind and advocates for social justice and the humane and equitable treatment of all community members, regardless of visa status or cultural background.

RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES

When Monash Council became a Refugee Welcome Zone, it made a public commitment to welcome refugees into the community, to encourage empathy and understanding and to promote positive attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Monash Council has been a leading advocate on multicultural and social justice issues, including those relating to support refugees and asylum seekers. Monash Council is one of the lead Councils involved with the Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum, seeking to advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, mainly through improved policy implementation and service provision.

Officers work closely with a range of non-Government organisations and community service providers through formal networks such as the Monash Multicultural Settlement Services Network to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers living in the Monash area are well-supported and are made to feel welcome in the community.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The benefits in becoming a RWZ Leadership Council are primarily in relation to public acknowledgement and greater opportunities to engage with RCOA staff, access to useful information and the opportunity to learn about initiatives and programs being implemented across the RWZ network. The annual membership payment of \$5000 also provides financial support to RCOA.

In order to leverage the role as a Leadership Council, it would be prudent to approach such a role as an opportunity to deliver more proactive advocacy and community engagement initiatives. If this is unable to be committed to (either due to lack of budget or staff capacity) there appears to be little benefit to becoming a Leadership Council.