

6.2.6 Safer Communities across Cardinia Shire

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Recommendation(s)

That Council:

1. Takes a strong stance in denouncing violence and related anti-social behaviours in our community.
2. Advocates for increased policing resources for our growing Cardinia Community.
3. Advocates for funding for a range of youth engagement programs to be available in Cardinia Shire, such as the Victoria Police Embedded Youth Program, Cardinia Police Connections Program and other local agency programs.
4. Considers, through its budget process, appropriate initiatives to strengthen Council's response to community safety.
5. Affirms that every resident of Cardinia Shire has the right to live in a safe community regardless of race, ethnicity, ability or sexuality.

Attachments

Nil

Executive Summary

A safe community is not just one that is free of crime, violence, and anti-social behaviour; it is one that focuses on creating a safer community at all levels, within all areas. Safety is a fundamental human right and is essential to the wellbeing of our community. It is also a key outcome of Councils Liveability Plan.

Council promotes an inclusive municipality that respects human rights, celebrates diversity, and fosters participation in all aspects of community life and is central to our goal of achieving better outcomes for every resident. Building a safe community is multifaceted and requires a coordinated, whole of community approach to respond effectively to local and regional issues. The formation of building and maintaining strong partnerships between a wide range of government and community services are critical to achieving outcomes that contribute to a cohesive, connected, participatory, empowered, and safe community .

Considering recent events of unsafe behaviour and criminal activity taking place across the Shire it is recommended that Council commit to strengthening its position for a safer Cardinia through endorsing the following recommendations:

- Reiterating Councils view that violence will not be tolerated in respect to all Cardinia residents. Council affirms that each resident has the right to live in a safe community regardless of race, ethnicity, (dis)ability and sexuality.
- Increase advocacy for increased policing to service Cardinia Shire.
- Actively advocate for the Victoria Police Embedded Youth Program be available within Cardinia Shire
- Actively continue to seek community safety funding through a variety of grant opportunities.
- Increased communications to the community on what is a safer community and how we can all work towards creating a safer Cardinia.

Background

In 2014, Council made the commitment to develop a more coordinated and structured approach to creating a safer community, one that is not only free of crime, violence and anti-social behaviour; but one that is focused on creating a safer environment at all levels, and agreed to begin working towards designation as an International Safe Community. At the same time, a decision was made to move away from the term community safety to safer communities so that an all-encompassing, proactive approach was ensured.

In 2015, Council undertook an extensive internal scoping exercise, community consultation and review of existing data, statistics and research in order to develop a baseline; understanding the Shire's current position and the issues that affect and are important to the community. Through this approach six themes became the key focus for Council and the basis of a Cardinia Safer Communities Strategy which was then developed in 2016, these included:

- Road, pedestrian and transport related issues
- Crime
- Family violence
- Mental health related issues
- Drug and alcohol related issues
- Natural hazards (emergency management)

In 2016, to support Cardinia's designation as an International Safe Community, the Cardinia Safer Communities Strategic Committee was established with the purpose of addressing local community safety, injury and crime prevention issues by working in partnership with all major stakeholders through a whole of community partnership response. This committee provided leadership in the identification, development and evaluation of activities and programs. In November 2017 Cardinia Shire Council was awarded the 388 International Safer Communities Designation.

During 2019 a review was undertaken by Council to determine if it was appropriate to continue to operate under the 2016 Safer Communities Strategic Committee structure. A number of key factors influenced this review including the creation of the Cardinia Shire Council Liveability Plan and associated structure in 2018. From this review a new committee, the Cardinia Safer Communities Partnership Committee was established, This Partnership, still in operation, reviews and identifies key priorities areas, while also ensuring no duplication of meetings/misalignment across key programs.

The Safer Communities Partnership Committee consists of representation from the following organisations and community members:

- Cardinia Shire Council
- Victoria Police
- Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Windermere
- Kooweerup Regional Health Service
- Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation
- Neighbourhood Watch Cardinia
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- Chisholm Institute
- Department of Education and Training
- Parks Victoria

- Springvale Monash Legal
- Other invited guests as required

Community Safety as of 2021

The Safer Communities Partnership Committee continues to meet monthly with focus on knowledge sharing, emerging issues, community focussed communication and data analysis. The priority areas determined by the Committee included:

- Mental Health.
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- General Crime
- Road Safety
- Diversity
- Family Violence
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
- Youth Crime
- Safety Messaging

Since the review in 2019, key work relating to safer communities has included; Council staff trained in Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) to enable Council to undertake CPTED audits on new and existing facilities and spaces across the Shire. The development and endorsement of a CCTV Policy. Council successfully awarded a \$500K grant for the 'Safely Connecting the Communities of Cardinia' project enabling increased CCTV cameras and increase monitoring across the Shire. The project also encompasses the development of a Crime Prevention Strategy and upgrading access security at a large number of Council facilities.

The related areas of mental health, emergency management, road and pedestrian safety and Together We Can (family violence) continue to be addressed through Council-run committees, programs and services.

The development of a Safer Cardinia Communications Plan which aims to increase communications on safer communities and assisting to reduce the perception of a high level of crime across the Shire.

The Safer Communities Strategy is now due for review four years from endorsement. Community consultation is again required to determine the key focus areas relating to a safer community. Through the review an integrated framework will be considered, this framework will include the following principles:

1. Recognising crime and safety as quality-of-life issues.
2. Working across boundaries both horizontally and vertically.
3. Recognising the crucial role of local government leadership and advocacy
4. Adapting strategies to local needs based on good analysis and targeted plans.
5. Building capacity.
6. Developing tools and measurements of success.

Round Table

Cardinia Shire Council hosted a Building a Safer Cardinia – Round Table meeting with community representatives and members on Monday, 8th February 2021 to listen to their concerns regarding unsafe behaviour and criminal activity and to discuss positive actions to create a safer Cardinia.

Council's meeting was attended by government, community and agency representatives and was held in response to community concerns about criminal behaviour and to inform Council's advocacy efforts.

A number of ideas were presented to strengthen the feelings and experience of community safety across the Shire. These included:-

- Strengthening inclusion and belonging
- Strengthening the voices of women
- Open space design and maintenance
- Empowering local community to deliver engagement activities that reach across demographics and cultures
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Youth leadership and engagement
- More opportunity for cultural connection
- Raising the profile of equality and respect across the community
- Importance of timely, accurate information
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
- Increased personal responsibility for safety
- Utilisation of community facilities as avenues for partnership and collaboration
- Increase in community events such as Harmony Day and Neighbour Day
- Accessing government grant opportunities to enhance community safety
- Whole of community approach founded on community involvement in decision making
- The important role of “place” in bringing people together
- Better access to mental health services
- Cross generational opportunities to build relationships between young people and our older residents
- Anticipating and planning for the impacts of growth and higher density living

Policy Implications

The commitment to Community Safety aligns to the Liveability Plan Domain of:

Health & Social Services: In Cardinia Shire, local services, and community group's work together to ensure residents can access appropriate and affordable services and facilities which promote and protect health and wellbeing throughout life.

Aligns with the Outcomes of:

- Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Improved Social Cohesion
- Improved Safety
- Reduced Family Violence
- Reduce the harm from tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and gambling

Relevance to Council Plan

1.6 Our People - Increased awareness of safety

1.6.1 Work with the Police, Victorian Government and the community to improve safety in homes, businesses, public places and roads.

1.6.2 Improve awareness of township safety in local communities.

Climate Emergency Consideration

Nil.

Consultation/Communication

A significant consultation process was undertaken in 2016 when first establishing the Safer Communities Strategy, this consultation set the key focus areas for Council's safety direction. Since this time a comprehensive governance structure has allowed for feedback from community and our agency partners on emerging focus areas, trends and data on community safety. The recent 'Imagine Cardinia' - community engagement survey again provided residents input on community safety. Going forward a Crime Prevention Panel will be held on 8 February 2021 to allow Councillors and Council to understand the community safety issues currently experienced in the community. This will be followed by a significant community engagement process to inform the review of the Safer Community Strategy due for review as outlined above.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no increased financial or resource implications associated with this commitment from Council at the time of writing this report.

Conclusion

This report has provided a precis of some of the important work being undertaken since Cardinia Shire's designation of as an International Safer Community in 2017, it has highlighted the importance placed on community safety by Cardinia Shire Council. In conjunction with our key community safety partners, Council has regularly reviewed and when appropriate adjusted the approach needed to achieve a safer community.

With a recent increase in criminal activity and unsafe behaviour across the Shire and the negative impact this is having on our community, Cardinia Council and its elected representatives believe it essential to reaffirm its commitment that all residents should be free to live in a safe community.