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PREVENTING FAMILY VIOLENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

held on 4 August 2020 at 10.30am in Microsoft Teams (online)

Present: Cr Lara Carli, Mayor
Cr Bob Turner, Councillor
Cr Sophie Ramsey, Councillor
Matthew Wilson, Melton City Council
Christine Levy, Melton City Council
Jayde McBurnie, Melton City Council
Sarah Grace, Melton City Council
Genia Sawczyn, Department of Health and Human Services
Rachana Bangara, Brotherhood St Lawrence
Martin Ha, Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre
Sophie Mast, Women's Health West
Gehan Shehab, Department of Justice and Community Safety
Lian Tu, MiCare (joined at 11.15am)

Chairperson: Cr Lara Carli, Mayor

1. Welcome

Cr Carli welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Cr Kathy Majdlik, Councillor
Cr Michelle Mendes, Councillor
Cr Goran Kesic, Councillor
Cr Yvonne Sebire, Councillor
Cr Steven Abboushi, Councillor
Cr Ken Hardy, Councillor
Melissa Sapuppo, Djerriwarrh Health Services

3. Declaration of interests and/or conflict of interests

Nil.

4. Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting

Noted

Minutes of the Preventing Family Violence Advisory Committee meeting held on 12 May 2020 will be adopted by Council at the 17 August 2020 Ordinary Meeting..

5. Business Arising

Terms of Reference were circulated to the Committee 22 May 2020.

Committee members were provided an opportunity to input on the 2020-2022 Equality & Respect Action Plan via email to be discussed in 6.2.

Preventing Family Violence Symposium delivery still to be confirmed. M Wilson discussed delivering the Symposium as an online event and the associated challenges to deliver on intended outcomes such as network connectivity in the sector. Cr Carli raised the opportunity of using Zoom, having the key guest speakers and Minister for Preventing Family Violence, as the main webinar then 'break out rooms' to provide networking opportunities. M Wilson responded that the feedback would be taken on board and Council officers would discuss how this might be facilitated.

G Sawczyn asked if it was possible to engage with the community during this lockdown time around the topic of family violence. S Grace informed the Committee that Council is hosting two training sessions around Recognise, Respond and Refer to Family Violence for community members in August.

Respect Victoria's Call it Out campaign announcement was circulated to the Committee on 22 May 2020.

6. General Business

6.1 Equality & Respect 2030 Progress Report 2019-2020 – J McBurnie

J McBurnie provided an overview of the Equality & Respect 2030 Strategy and the progress to date, including highlights across various program areas and learnings for future action plans. Over 90 per cent of the 2019-20 actions were completed, with the remaining actions deferred to future action plans. J McBurnie also highlighted the establishment of an internal cross-organisational Equality & Respect 2030 Steering Committee that will drive implementation of the Strategy and associated actions. G Sawczyn and Cr Carli commended Council officers on completing such a high number of actions, especially in light of the impact of COVID-19 on their work.

6.2 Equality & Respect 2030 Action Plan 2020-2022 – J McBurnie

The Equality & Respect 2020-22 Action Plan was circulated to the Committee for feedback with 69 actions across the two years.

G Sawczyn raised the issue of elder abuse and what Council was doing in this area. J McBurnie responded that the Strategy specifically focusses on the issue of preventing men's violence against women, however acknowledged the action around building better relationships with specialist stakeholder services, which would include elder abuse.

S Mast queried how the action plan fits into Council's broader work. J McBurnie outlined that the Strategy takes a 12 year approach with the objectives and strategies consistent in all subsequent action plans across this period, and offered to meet with S Mast to provide greater background context.

Action

J McBurnie to meet with S Mast to provide background on the Equality & Respect 2030 Strategy.

6.3 COVID-19 Service access and wait times – S Grace

S Grace asked Committee members to share experiences of their services in light of COVID-19, and how this may have impacted on service access and wait times.

S Mast from Women's Health West reported that the family violence team have reported that they are very busy, although they are still collecting data to provide actual service



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impacts. While there was an initial slight decrease in reports, this has now increased again. Staff are collecting anecdotal impacts of COVID-19, including access to services where victims are still living with perpetrators, or using COVID-19 as a way to control or restrict movement.

G Sawczyn highlighted the magnified concerns around an increase in elder abuse during the pandemic. Messaging around the pandemic has amplified the perceived vulnerability of older Australians which may have an impact on ageism, a key driver of elder abuse. A campaign by Respect Victoria 'Respect Older People: Call It Out' has been re-launched to encourage active by-standers to 'call it out' and encourage older people to access the support available.

M Ha from Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre reported that they have not seen an increase in family violence matters, although acknowledge that there can be some lack of visibility in this. While there has been a moratorium on evictions until September, there will likely be an increase in tenancy support after this period as clients struggle to pay rental debts. Changes to the courts has resulted in only urgent matters being seen, with family violence matters often deferred which may impact on family strain. CommUnity Legal will also be exploring the viability of providing legal assistance in property settlement to ensure greater economic security and support for family violence victim-survivors, as well as family law mediation within the City of Melton to avoid going to court. M Ha reported he would like to connect with any relevant services that could support this work. C Levy responded that she could talk further with M Ha about this.

C Levy reported L17 reports to Child First have increased 10-20 per cent, and while many of these do not eventuate into family support, it provides an indication of the number of family violence services that Victoria Police are attending. 'Operation Ribbon' Victoria Police initiative has continued where Family Violence Investigation Unit are actively checking in on victims assessed as high risk, with 30 per cent of victims reported to have the offender at home due to current financial pressures on families. There has also been an increase in adolescent violence in homes during COVID-19. Current changes to the courts are delaying intervention orders being granted, where the perpetrator does not have a consequence for interacting with the victim and family.

G Shehab reported there has been a significant drop in community based orders for those in the community, and only for those with attached prison sentences. The offenders' program to build family connections and the Men's Behaviour Change program are being run online. G Shehab also reported that many court dates are being pushed out as late as December 2020, with those in custody being prioritised over those in the community.

J McBurnie reported on work Council has been doing to obtain insights into COVID-19, with family violence contributing to a key proportion of research into the social impacts. Many organisations have reported increased severity of incidents and first time reports, up to six month wait lists, and an increase in calls to elder abuse hotlines. Other issues include lack of informal opportunities to support families such as through schools, and added issues around housing, job losses, financial impact and lack of access to material aid. There are also a number of gender inequity impacts of COVID-19, with women making up a higher proportion of frontline workers and teachers, and having larger job losses across affected industries such as retail, hospitality, tourism, beauty and fitness. There are some indications of positive impacts on men's uptake of flexible work arrangements which may have long-term benefits.

S Mast responded that there have also been a greater impact on women's mental health, stress, alcohol use and suicidal ideation compared to men.

6.4 16 Days of Activism and Allyship – S Grace

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S Grace provided an overview of the western region partnership that will be working on the 16 Days of Activism campaign with a focus on working with men around allyship in gender equity. The campaign will run from 25 November to 10 December 2020.

G Sawczyn asked about the previous Brimbank project Working Together with Men and what previous work Council has done in engaging men. S Grace responded that the Sons of the West participants have had sessions on gender equity, and J McBurnie reported on the work with fathers through the Baby Makes 3 program, both of which provide a good opportunity to engage these men in the campaign.

There will likely be an online event which will be open to men more broadly, and S Grace invited members to suggest ideas and to help promote the campaign throughout their networks.

Action

S Grace to circulate information on the 16 Days of Activism campaign to the Committee.

6.5 Member Updates

Members did not have any further updates.

Cr Carli thanked the members for their contribution to the Committee. Cr Ramsey also acknowledged the formidable activities that have been run in preventing family violence and the hard work of the member organisations. Cr Turner thanked members for their contributions.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held on 10 November 2020 commencing at 10.30am in Melton Civic Centre, 232 High St Melton (Civic Room 2).

8. Close of Business

The meeting closed at 11.50am.