

6 URGENT BUSINESS

MINUTE 629

Moved by: Cr Matthew Kirwan

Seconded by: Cr Roz Blades AM

That Council resolves to accept an item of Urgent Business relating to a Notice of Motion about advocacy against cuts to the Federal Government's Status Resolution Support Services.

CARRIED

6.1 NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 54 - Advocacy against cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program

Responsible Officer:

Director Community Services

Author:

Cr Matthew Kirwan

Preamble

Since 1993 the Federal Government, in various forms, have financially supported people while their claim for asylum is being considered.

This program is now called the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) program. It provides a basic living allowance (typically 89% of Newstart allowance – currently equating to \$247 a week), casework support and access to torture and trauma counselling. It is delivered by not-for-profit agencies across Australia and is also used to support other vulnerable migrants in need.

From August 2017, the Department reduced who can get support from the program. For example students, including people studying English for employment were taken off the program.

Further changes to the eligibility criteria of the SSRS program will occur from the 1st of May 2018 after which the re-assessment process will start. From the 4th of June 2018 SRSS asylum seeking recipients who are assessed as being job ready will commence exiting the program, losing all income, casework and allied supports.

Single recipients will be assessed first, followed by couples without children and finally couples with children. Single parent families and those with heightened vulnerabilities (eg disabilities, chronic or terminal illnesses, being aged 70 & over), may subject to assessment, continue to be supported within the program but what support they receive is not clear as the re-design of the program may see these groups stay on the program but not receive any financial assistance.

Accurate job readiness assessment for sustainable employment is difficult to assess. Due to the narrow list of exclusions there is a strong concern in the sector that the majority of people seeking asylum will be affected by the action and be even more disadvantaged than other job seekers in the marketplace.

6.1 NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 54 - Advocacy against cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program (Cont.)

This action will leave many people destitute. People seeking asylum are already seeking emergency assistance in increasing numbers from agencies and other charities throughout Australia. Many of these are charities that receive no money from the government. This Council has previously strongly advocated for greater resources for agencies to deal with the humanitarian challenges of people seeking asylum in the community, acknowledging that they already live in poverty due to the limited financial support offered by the SSRS program and the inability to find work – this latest change will take it to the level of a humanitarian crisis as requests for places to live, and money for clothes, food and medicine, will only escalate.

An alliance of close to 100 civil society organisations, including the Refugee Council of Australia (Convenor of the Refugee Welcome Zones program of which this Council has been a member since 2002), and the Australian Council of Social Service (the peak body of community welfare agencies), is calling on the government to urgently reverse their position to cut income support for people seeking asylum. Also in the alliance are the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Bapcare, Centrecare, Jesuit Social Services, Refugee Legal, St Vincent de Paul, The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church.

In Greater Dandenong we have almost 2000 people seeking asylum in the community awaiting a decision. The majority will be affected by these changes to the SRSS program and these people will continue to face significant challenges in finding employment. Loss of income and case management support will be accentuated by the uncertainty of their status in Australia, language and cultural barriers, and the effects of torture and trauma.

It will lead to increased incidence of mental health issues which is already common among people seeking asylum. Poverty and mental health issues will erode the social cohesion that Greater Dandenong Council has invested so much in achieving.

This Notice of Motion is consistent with the humanitarian advocacy we have been pursuing relating to people seeking asylum since 2014. It is aligned with the advocacy priorities of the recently endorsed People Seeking Asylum and Refugees Action Plan 2018-2021.

This Notice of Motion has been reviewed by and was supported by the Council's Asylum Seeker and Refugee Communities Advisory Committee at its meeting on 19th April, 2018.

Motion**That:**

- 1. Council Urgently writes to the Federal Minister of Home Affairs and the Prime Minister asking the Federal Government to reverse these cuts and highlighting the likely social impacts on the Greater Dandenong community;**
- 2. local State and Federal lower house members of Parliament and Victorian Senators and State Upper House MPs are informed of Council's position;**
- 3. agencies and community groups assisting people seeking asylum in Greater Dandenong, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Social Service are informed of Council's position and its support of the alliance of community organisations;**

6.1 NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 54 - Advocacy against cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program (Cont.)

4. a media release be issued outlining Greater Dandenong's position and that the Greater Dandenong Council advocacy page be updated with this Council resolution and any associated actions; and
5. that other Victorian Councils are contacted seeking their support for joint advocacy on this issue;

MINUTE 630

Moved by: Cr Matthew Kirwan

Seconded by: Cr Roz Blades AM

That:

1. Council Urgently writes to the Federal Minister of Home Affairs and the Prime Minister asking the Federal Government to reverse these cuts and highlighting the likely social impacts on the Greater Dandenong community;
2. local State and Federal lower house members of Parliament and Victorian Senators and State Upper House MPs are informed of Council's position;
3. agencies and community groups assisting people seeking asylum in Greater Dandenong, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Social Service are informed of Council's position and its support of the alliance of community organisations;
4. a media release be issued outlining Greater Dandenong's position and that the Greater Dandenong Council advocacy page be updated with this Council resolution and any associated actions; and
5. that other Victorian Councils are contacted seeking their support for joint advocacy on this issue;

MINUTE 631

Moved by: Cr Angela Long

Seconded by: Cr Maria Sampey

That Cr Matthew Kirwan be granted an extension of time of one (1) minute to speak for the motion.

CARRIED

6.1 NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 54 - Advocacy against cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program (Cont.)

MINUTE 632

Moved by: Cr Matthew Kirwan

Seconded by: Cr Heang Tak

That Cr Roz Blades AM be granted an extension of time of one (1) minute to speak for the motion.

CARRIED

MINUTE 633

Moved by: Cr Matthew Kirwan

Seconded by: Cr Loi Truong

That Cr Tim Dark be granted an extension of time of one (1) minute to speak against the motion.

CARRIED

MINUTE 634

Moved by: Cr Matthew Kirwan

Seconded by: Cr Loi Truong

That Cr Sean O'Reilly be granted an extension of time of one (1) minute to speak for the motion.

CARRIED

6.1 NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 54 - Advocacy against cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program (Cont.)

MINUTE 635

Moved by: Cr Angela Long

Seconded by: Cr Maria Sampey

That Cr Matthew Kirwan be granted an extension of time of one (1) minute to speak for the motion.

CARRIED

CARRIED (REFER TO MINUTE NUMBER 630)

For the Motion: Cr Roz Blades AM, Cr Youhorn Chea, Cr Matthew Kirwan, Cr Angela Long, Cr Jim Memeti, Cr Sean O'Reilly, Cr Maria Sampey, Cr Heang Tak, Cr Loi Truong

Against the Motion: Cr Tim Dark (called for the division)