Our Ref: LL | LR

30 September 2024

Change for Children Strategy Team
Tasmanian Government

Via email: changeforchildren@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Strategy Team

Change for Children Consultation Draft

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Change for Children Consultation Draft*. This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) on behalf of Tasmanian local government in collaboration with our members; all 29 councils.

LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate for local government in Tasmania. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that council in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by the LGAT for that specific issue.

Please contact Dr. Lynden Leppard if you have any questions or would like further information, at lynden.leppard@lgat.tas.gov.au or (03) 6146 3744.

Yours sincerely,

Dion Lester
Chief Executive Officer

LGAT Submission: Change for Children Consultation Draft

Introduction

Councils have unique perspectives on the local communities they serve. There is no equivalent to the statewide network that offers an integrated and continuous source of knowledge of what is happening locally and why. This information is critical for the State Government in development, implementation, and evaluation of child safe public policy.

Local government is a necessary partner in system change. It is an integral element of the whole of government structures, policies, and practices and it contributes people, knowledge, infrastructure and funding (Change for Children draft, p. 24) that will be essential to making children safer in every community.

The current common practice of funding organisations and setting up administrative processes that replicate what local government already does, or could, is wasteful and inefficient. A challenge for the State Government is to build on the potential in local government rather than continue to experiment with funding short term 'pilots' and replications that are not sustainable.

Clarification is needed on the Tasmanian Government's understanding of where local government fits in the reform concept of a whole of government approach.

We have continually engaged with the government over the last 18 months on the development of the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023* and the practical implementation of the Child Safe Standards. During that time, we have advocated that with appropriate resourcing local government is uniquely positioned to support statewide and consistent local community implementation of the Child Safe Standards and commitment to child safety.

In February this year we began contributing to the State Government's approach to implementing the Tasmanian Commission of Inquiry (CoI) recommendation to develop a whole-of-government child sexual abuse reform strategy for preventing, identifying, and responding to child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours. We are funded as Change Leads to implement our plan, that includes councils' role in child safety in communities across Tasmania.

Response to the Consultation Draft

Local government is not mentioned in the *Change for Children Consultation Draft* but is included in the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse. Local government is an essential sphere of government for implementing government policy when appropriately resourced alongside their regulatory responsibilities, and the statewide partner with non-government organisations (NGOs) in their specialist provision of government-funded services.

We request that the final Change for Children Strategy acknowledges this unique role and local government's contribution is described in the strategy and plan. The specific roles will depend on the structure of the final plan and what resourcing is made available to councils to support their role. Our approach to system reform, the unique and essential contributions of councils, and suggestions for practical action provide guidance for designing those roles.

Local government's essential role in public policy can help system reform.

The system reform embedded in Change for Children includes public policy more broadly. This includes the ongoing cycle of policy planning, implementation, evaluation, and response. Understanding local government's practical contribution at each stage of that cycle is an essential element of any reform. A readily available reform action is drawing on the unique position that local government contributes to policy and program outcomes based on networks, infrastructure, expertise and accountabilities that are already in place.

The current Priority Areas can readily demonstrate system reform by including local government as a practical partner in the whole of government approach central to the reform agenda. The Priority Areas currently limit actions to "achieve significant transformation for children and young people" (p.34) to lead agencies. There is recognition that they will collaborate with "community organisations where appropriate" (p. 32). Local government is much more than a community organisation and is not mentioned here, or anywhere else in the draft Strategy and Plan.

Local government's contribution to system reform will be practical action through partnerships in local communities. This is the driving principle in LGAT's Safeguarding Children Project Plan as a Change Lead organisation. The partnership approach we describe can support the Priority Areas. Some broad possibilities are identified below, with further details on the specific opportunities and resourcing required to support them to be developed through collaboration with the State Government and relevant community organisations.

All councils are implementing the Standards and that provides a foundation for practical and local implementation of the Action Areas

Youth justice Standard Four

DPAC has consulted with at least one council on its contribution to supporting young people connected to youth justice services. A refreshed youth justice approach across Tasmania could tap into the strong youth-connections of a number of councils around the state.

Tasmanian Aboriginal People Universal Principle

Local government has an identified role to play in Closing the Gap and local engagement, decision making, and consultation with Aboriginal communities.

Child Safe Cultures - Standards One and Three

Councils have ongoing formal and informal lead roles to play in every community in influencing cultural change through these priorities.

Child and community voice - Standards Two and Three

Councils are the aligned and statewide level of government closest to where children and young people live. This is where they learn about and experience the world. Councils already contribute deeply to keeping children safe in many ways and this can be extended to achieve the aims for Change for Children.

Workforce - Standard Five

The local government statewide workforce is already a significant resource in keeping children and young people safe. Councils can make valuable and unique practical contributions to the actions identified in this priority area. Appropriate alignment of the existing workforce to the Tasmanian State Service workforce would be a powerful system reform. That alignment could include professional development, career pathways, project collaboration and agreed shared practices.

Local government's role in supporting community understanding of a commitment to child safety and consistent whole of community implementation of the Standards.

There is a natural alignment between the development of the child sexual abuse reform strategy recommendation emerging from the CoI and the LGAT Child and Youth Safe Standards implementation plan. Implementation of the Standards amongst councils began in 2023, with our role supporting consistent implementation and to develop the foundations to

build long term effective practice and cultural change. The focus continues to be on the development of shared statewide policies and procedures, with an overall purpose of influencing organisational culture. This ongoing work is funded wholly by the sector and is being done in collaboration with the Office of the Independent Regulator.

Provided there is appropriate resourcing, councils as statewide, enduring local organisations may also be able to support local implementation of recommendation 6.12[1] from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and to realise the opportunities for alignment across the CoI, the Royal Commission and the State Government's whole of community approach to implementing the Child and Youth Safe Standards.

With appropriate resourcing councils and LGAT can:

- partner with state government agencies to support local actions as expressions of agency wide initiatives.
- support local sport, recreation, social and cultural activities that are not included in the work of not-for-profit organisations funded to support specific needs.
- support a consistent local approach and shared understanding across government services, government funded not-for-profits, neighbourhood houses, local community groups, and councils.

[1] *Recommendation 6.12 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Information Sheet for Councils (July 2023)*

LGAT's whole of system conceptual framework.

This systems model was developed for our Safeguarding Children Plan. It demonstrates our understanding of how the different policies, requirements, and possibilities can be understood as a coherent system. We bring this understanding to our shared determination to look after all our children.

