

Recommendation 6.12 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Information Sheet for Councils

July 2023

Introduction

Recommendation 6.12 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) calls on local governments to designate child safety officer positions to carry out a range of functions, discussed in detail below. Recommendation 6.12 was accepted in principle in the Tasmanian Government response to the Royal Commission published in June 2018. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of recommendation 6.12 across Tasmania.

DPAC has developed this information sheet to assist councils in progressing their implementation of recommendation 6.12 while they also prepare for the establishment of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework¹.

¹ www.justice.tas.gov.au/carcru/home

Recommendation 6.12

The Royal Commission's findings include a recommendation relating to local government as it recognises that:

Local governments play several important roles in communities that impact on the safety of children, such as:

- *providing services to children, for example libraries, swimming pools and childcare;*
- *providing spaces for community activities, for example halls, theatres and sports grounds;*
- *funding or contracting services;*
- *facilitating community education or outreach programs; and*
- *regulating planning and development approvals, infrastructure and property services, and water and food inspection.*

Recommendation 6.12 states that:

With support from governments at the national, state and territory levels, local governments should designate child safety officer positions from existing staff profiles to carry out the following functions:

- a) developing child safe messages in local government venues, grounds and facilities;*
- b) assisting local institutions to access online child safe resources;*
- c) providing child safety information and support to local institutions on a needs basis; and*
- d) supporting local institutions to work collaboratively with key services to ensure child safe approaches are culturally safe, disability aware and appropriate for children from diverse backgrounds.*

Interpretation

The Royal Commission describes child safety officers in its *Final Report: Volume 6, Making institutions child safe*²:

Many smaller institutions told us they would need support to understand why and how they can comply with mandatory child safe standards and create a child safe environment.

Local governments resource and support communities across Australia – especially in rural and remote areas. In many places, they are the central hub for the community. Many local governments have taken a proactive role in community safety. For example, South Australia has child safety officers who provide advice and awareness training to sport and recreation institutions. They are the first point of contact for people involved in sport and recreation institutions who have concerns about a participating child or

² *Final Report: Volume 6, Making institutions child safe* Page 301, available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/making-institutions-child-safe

young person. A rural city council in Victoria has appointed two child safety officers to help prevent and respond to concerns of abuse.

Local government, in collaboration with the independent state and territory oversight body, could be well placed to build on this role by playing a capacity building and support function to help institutions understand how they can be child safe. We believe this could be by creating child safety officers through new recruitment or employing existing community officers to foster stronger community understanding.

The Report specifies that the role of a child safety officer would be “to support and provide guidance to smaller, community-based institutions such as sport and recreation clubs and businesses, and to other local businesses providing services to children in each local government area. It would be an information source, a conduit of information to paid and volunteer workers, and an outreach service³ for the under-resourced.”

Implementation and resources

Implementation of recommendation 6.12 would require that councils designate child safety officer positions with responsibility for the functions outlined in the recommendation. Notably, these officers would:

- I. act as a conduit of information on child safe practices from the Independent Regulator⁴ and other authorities (eg. Child Safety Service) to community groups engaged with the council and other organisations that reach out to council seeking information on child safe obligations and practices.
 - At a minimum, advice should be available on council websites and in the community in an accessible format, with the officers available for the community to contact for information to support their compliance with the Child Safe Standards under the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework, and the creation of a child safe environment as outlined in recommendation 6.12. This does not include being a point of referral for child wellbeing and safety, however child safety officers should be aware of the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line and mandatory reporting requirements.

³ The Report’s reference to “an outreach service” does not imply a responsibility for councils to provide new or additional services requiring a physical presence in rural and remote communities. Rather, the term outreach should be considered as providing an avenue through which the Independent Regulator can use a council’s networks and existing communication channels to reach community groups and local organisations.

⁴ The Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework will be regulated by an independent body, known as the Independent Regulator.

- It is expected that materials will be developed and provided to councils for this purpose (ie. councils will not be expected to develop their own material). Council officers will also be able to redirect people to resources available online.
2. ensure that those organisations formally engaging with the council (ie. those receiving grants from the council or using council facilities) understand their obligations and are implementing appropriate child safe practices. It is expected that materials to support this function will also be developed to promote state-wide consistency.

The Report recommends that a child safety officer should work closely with the independent state and territory oversight body responsible for monitoring and enforcing the Child Safe Standards and other child safe initiatives⁵. In Victoria, for example, the Office of the Children’s Guardian (also the Independent Regulator) provides a vast range of resources⁶ relating to the safety and support of children and young people. Although it has not yet been confirmed who the Independent Regulator will be in Tasmania, the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Bill 2022 gives the Regulator responsibility for, among other things, “educating, and providing advice to, entities to ensure that, in the operation of the entity – (i) the safety of children is promoted; and (ii) child abuse is prevented; and (iii) allegations of child abuse are responded to properly.”⁷ This can reasonably be expected to assist councils in fulfilling the requirements of recommendation 6.12.

Accountability

Accountability for implementation of recommendation 6.12 has previously been through the annual report released publicly each year. In December 2022, the fifth and final annual report⁸ provided this update:

The Tasmanian Government is committed to implementing a child safety framework for all organisations engaged in child-related services to ensure cultural change in organisations, so that keeping children safe from abuse is embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of leaders, staff and volunteers.

The Local Government Association of Tasmania is currently working with councils to enhance child safe messaging and provide information and support to local institutions. Individual councils continue to work through this recommendation.

⁵ Final Report: Volume 6, Making institutions child safe Page, page 302, available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/making-institutions-child-safe

⁶ www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/resources/

⁷ Child and Youth Safe Organisations Bill 2022, s16(b), available online at www.parliament.tas.gov.au/Bills/Bills2022/54_of_2022.html

⁸ Annual Progress Reports, available online at www.justice.tas.gov.au/carcru/tasmanian-response-to-the-royal-commission

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This recommendation will be further progressed when the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework is finalised.

The requirement to report publicly on the Royal Commission recommendations has now ceased. Therefore, commencing this year (2023), the Office of Local Government (OLG) in DPAC proposes to coordinate annual reporting across councils so that they can describe in their own words, their progress in implementing recommendation 6.12. The format of this annual reporting will be developed in consultation with councils but will provide an opportunity for councils to share their experience implementing 6.12, including case studies illustrating best practice and positive outcomes.

The OLG will work with the Local Government Association of Tasmania to facilitate communities of practice style learning across the sector, so that councils can share, collaborate and learn from each other as they implement recommendation 6.12.

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