



Submission

Child Safety Officers in Local Government

Consultation questions

Responses to consultation questions are due to the Department of Communities by Close of Business on Friday, 2 April 2021. Responses can be emailed to csaroyalcommission@communities.wa.gov.au.

- 1) **Please specify which local government you are responding on behalf of.**
Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale
- 2) **What is your role within the organisation?**
Council
- 3) **Please consider each of the functions of a child safety officer and the three accompanying questions for each.**
 - a) **Developing child safe messages in local government venues, grounds and facilities;**

In what ways is this function already being delivered within your local government and by which existing role/s and portfolio/s?

There are currently no roles that specifically address the development of child safe messages in Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale venues, grounds and facilities.

The Shire shares resources and information about accessibility and inclusion for children and young people to hirers of community facilities as it is made available to us by external parties.

The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale does have a Youth Development team that delivers programs and activities directly to youth (being 12 to 18 years of age), however no dedicated team for the Early Years cohort (under 12 years of age) outside of programs and activities delivered in Libraries such as Better Beginnings, Story Time and Rhyme Time.

In what ways can this existing work be built upon to implement the function, as recommended by the Royal Commission?

There is no current role dedicated to this purpose or function. In the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale, there is a Community Development Officer (0.8FTE), Club Development Officer (1FTE; currently on secondment) and a Community Safety Officer (0.6FTE). These roles all provide general advice to clubs and groups for continual improvement purposes and effective management of their organisations, however, are currently at capacity. Consultation on matters outside of the current scope of their work will require either additional resourcing, or the removal of current tasks from their workload.



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Until it is clear what is required from the role, and what frameworks will be in existence for them to be guided by it is challenging to provide an outline of how this could be implemented.

It would be possible to share child safety resources to hirers of Shire facilities, if they were to be provided by an external party.

What supports or training might be needed to achieve full implementation of this function?

The Shire is not supportive of the requirement for local governments to develop child safety messages. The Shire considers that all messages and resources should be developed by the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and provided to local governments to display in their facilities and share through their networks. This will ensure a consistency of messaging across the state and lower incidences of incorrect messaging.

Costs for the production and installation of signage within the Shire would also need to be subsidised, estimated at an approximate cost of \$3,500:

- 20 venues x 2 hour labour for installation @ \$75 = \$3,000
- 47 printed signs + design = \$500

b) Assisting local institutions to access online child safe resources.

Comments provided by WALGA are supported by the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale:

Local Governments generally indicated this would be simple to support, as these messages could be incorporated into existing local government websites, social media, e-newsletters etc.

A suite of online templates and resources readily available for use which signpost local community to the most appropriate information would be required. This could be achieved in much the same way that local governments have directed community to the most appropriate material during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What supports or training might be needed to achieve full implementation of this function?

This function could be accommodated in current operations, with training to Shire Staff outlining where resources are located, how to access and who to call for additional information.

The Shire considers that all resources should be developed and provided to local governments by the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

However, it may be necessary to provide information sessions to the community on how to access these online resources.



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c) Providing child safety information and support to local institutions on a need's basis;

In what ways is this function already being delivered within your local government and by which existing role/s and portfolio/s?

This function is of greatest concern to the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale. It is not a function currently delivered by the organisation, with the Shire considering that the Department of Communities is the body with oversight and responsibility for child safety and support in Western Australia.

Without a clear framework of responsibilities and overarching policies that set clear direction for local government and local institutions, comments on how to support external parties are speculative only.

The Shire considers that "local institutions" broadly fit within one of two categories:

Local Not for Profit Organisations (such as sporting and community groups)

There are some roles within the Shire that currently provide support and guidance to local sporting and community based NFP's for improved governance and management purposes. However, these organisations will not be mandatorily subjected to the Reportable Conduct Scheme. With no legislative requirement for these organisations to implement child safe practices, nor a relevant entity under the draft Reportable Conduct Scheme there is foreseeably a reputational risk to the Shire in the community's understanding of our role and function. It is expected that the community will perceive the Shire as both an expert in the field of child safety (which could be the case with significant training and support from oversight bodies), and/or a body responsible for ensuring organisations are complicit with being child safe under the Act.

For Profit Businesses and Organisations

The Shire currently has 1FTE dedicated to Tourism and Business Development, however the function of this role is to connect businesses to expert bodies should they need assistance with their operations. It is not the function of the Shire to provide guidance and advice to for-profit organisations on how they should conduct their business and as such do not see the provision of child safety support to these organisations as a role of the Shire. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry or other dedicated body would be better placed to provide this function.

The Shire is concerned that Shire Officers who are not trained or experienced in Child Safety will be subjected to disclosure of information in regard to child safety matters and concerns, and it is important to consider the welfare and mental wellbeing of staff who are exposed in this environment. The Shire expresses concern regarding the potential costs associated with workers compensation claims from staff in these circumstances.



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In what ways can this existing work be built upon to implement the function, as recommended by the Royal Commission?

The Shire strongly supports the position that further work needs to be undertaken on the oversight body and reportable conduct scheme, prior to providing significant comment on how a Child Safety Officer could undertake the role of providing external advice to local institutions. There is currently no formal context that outlines what support and information would be provided by the role and what supporting bodies would be available to assist.

Local governments should be empowered and supported to become the “gold star” benchmark example of child safe organisations, and this should remain the focus of efforts prior to consideration of a Child Safe Officer that provides external advice.

The Shire would be at considerable risk of being seen as a “Do as I say, not as I do” organisation by the community if our own practices and procedures are not strong, robust and substantially imbedded across the whole organisation.

Department of Communities staff should be assigned to each region and should be responsible for the provision of support and advice to community institutions in that regions, with local governments having responsibility only for the facilitation of provision of information.

What supports or training might be needed to achieve full implementation of this function?

The Shire will require training be provided at no cost for dedicated Child Safety Officers, on an ongoing basis to ensure they have sufficient knowledge, skills and personal resilience in undertaking the role.

The Shire will require additional resources to imbed child safe practices across the organisation:

- Policy and procedure reviews
- Frequent personnel and documentation updates
- Potential changes to recruitment and procurement processes
- Possible additional FTE depending on the defined responsibility of the Child Safety Officer role.

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.

The Shire considers that local governments have a facilitation role to play in regard to this outcome. Shire’s can disseminate the resources provided by the Commission for Children and Young people and other State Government agencies and facilitate community involvement in information sessions and presentations from agencies such as the Department of Communities.

Facilitation of the sharing of information is a role that local government currently fulfils. However, the Shire does not consider that local governments have a role in specifically examining the operations of local institutions and providing operational change advice. The Shire also does not consider that it is the role of local governments to undertake any type of compliance assessments in regards to this, particularly if “local institutions” insinuates private and for-profit businesses.

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In what ways is this function already being delivered within your local government and by which existing role/s and portfolio/s?

The Shire currently facilitates an Access and Inclusion Advisory Group via the Community Activation team. The role of this group is to support the development, implementation, review and evaluation of the Shire's Disability Access and Inclusion Strategy to ensure Council delivers high quality outcomes for the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale community and advise Council on matters related to access and inclusion. The group supports the Shire to form positive community partnerships and support the Shire to achieve its objectives as stated in the Strategic Community Plan.

The administration and facilitation of this Advisory Group requires dedicated FTE across a variety of roles, and the outcomes delivered cross all areas of the organisation. Any similar model proposed for Child Safety matters would require additional staff.

Other networks in existence that could be utilised for the delivery of collaborative child safety messages (generally under the guidance of the Shire's Community Activation Team or equivalent network partners in other Local Government regions) includes:

- Community Youth Resilience Network
- Armadale Youth Network
- Communities for Children
- Sport Working Group
- Other Local Community Group stakeholder meetings (including sporting/equine/dance clubs, multicultural and spiritual establishments, art and community based organisations).

In what ways can this existing work be built upon to implement the function, as recommended by the Royal Commission?

Due to current workloads, any additional functions such as child safety would require additional resourcing. However, these networks could be utilised for knowledge sharing and dissemination of information purposes.

What supports or training might be needed to achieve full implementation of this function?

Further guidance and insight as to what is intended by "support to local institutions" would be required before the identification of essential training requirements could be undertaken.

4) Please specify any additional feedback in relation to the proposed implementation of child safety officers within Western Australia.

The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale is committed to improving Child Safety within our community, not just improving the perception of safety. As such, we strongly advocate for resources and support to develop ourselves as a child safety organisation, prior to further consideration to a Child Safety Officer and its associated functions.



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For this reason, the theory that local governments do not need to provide additional financial investment into implementing a Child Safety Officer role is ambitious and potentially misleading. Without the financial investment, gaps in services, information and consistent messaging is likely to result for communities (such as the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale) where Officers are already at capacity with the tasks they undertake. In the Shire's case, the fact that positions that may be upskilled to disseminate information are part time, means that there will be days organisations can not access immediate advice.

Training requirements as a minimum will have a financial impact on our organisation. For example, one hour of training would result in a resourcing commitment of 2.4 hours (specified positions only) to over 185 hours (whole of organisation training), even if the training facilitator was provided by a separate Department body or organisation.

The questions in this discussion paper have been focussed around implementation, being as specific as what requirements might be needed for training purposes. It is disappointing that comment has been sought on implementation prior to any specified advice pertaining to the State's involvement, role and actions for wider implementation of child safe practices and any mandatory requirements. This is directly relevant to the recommendation:

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 need's 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.*

Without understanding the State's position and potential support, the Shire's ability to implement remains subjective. The ability to feed into the process and influence considerations is warmly welcomed. The dissemination of knowledge, information and advice to organisations that require assistance and guidance is a worthy objective. However, as no review has yet been undertaken to current Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale organizational practices to consider our alignment to the National Principles, it seems pertinent to postpone the consideration of a Child Safety Officer until that has occurred.

Should there be a requirement from the State to both implement organisational wide changes as a result of the Reportable Conduct Scheme at the same time as taking ownership of a Child Safety Officer function, the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale is not adequately resourced. Our priority will be ensuring our own organisation meets the highest standard of Child Safety.

