



Ordinary Council Meeting

14 October 2020

LATE ITEM

REPORT

ITEM NO

SUBJECT

11.1.3

SHIRE RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE – SPONSORSHIP OF PHD STUDENT

LATE ITEM

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LOCATION/ADDRESS	Shire of Augusta Margaret River
APPLICANT/LANDOWNER	Shire of Augusta Margaret River
FILE REFERENCE	VTL/298, ENV/128
REPORT AUTHOR	Stephanie Addison-Brown, Chief Executive Officer
AUTHORISING OFFICER	Stephanie Addison-Brown, Chief Executive Officer

IN BRIEF

- In August 2020, Council endorsed the Corporate Business Plan 2020-2024 which included a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Chief Executive Officer. One of the KPIs was:

“Maintain the Shire as a leader in climate change mitigation and adaptation improving our scores across the ten WALGA climate excellence categories”.
- This item is to seek Council endorsement for a three year commitment for the Shire to sponsor a PhD student through Edith Cowan University South West (ECU SW). Sponsorship will be on the basis of the PhD student undertaking research and reporting on opportunities for mainstreaming responses to climate change across the Shire.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. Authorises the CEO to enter into an agreement with Edith Cowan University South West for the sponsorship of a PhD student to research and report on opportunities for mainstreaming a response to climate change across the Shire; and
 2. Allocates \$20,000 per annum in the Shire's Long Term Financial Plan for three years to support the PhD student.
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LOCATION PLAN

Nil

TABLED ITEMS

Nil

BACKGROUND

To achieve the KPI set by Council in the Shire's Corporate Business Plan 2020-2024, additional resources will be required to identify, research and assess appropriate changes across all Shire activities. Research into mainstreaming will need to look across all facets of local government responsibility and governance (including waste, vehicle fleet, civic buildings, procurement, investment etc) to arrive at whole of organisation outcomes aimed at mainstreaming climate action efforts with respect to actions, attitudes, policies and procedures. This work will need to take place over multiple years and will require a significant amount of time and resourcing to ensure that change is truly embedded throughout the organisation.

When considering the best way to approach this work, a number of options were considered, including allocation of additional staff/FTE, outsourcing the work or sponsoring a PhD student to undertake bespoke and specific research on behalf of the Shire. There is only one university (ECU SW) located in the South West that is able to provide the required supervision for a PhD student to undertake this work, and preliminary discussions have been held with the Dean to explore opportunities in this regard.

CONSULTATION AND ADVICE

External Consultation

The CEO has held preliminary discussions with the Dean of ECU SW to explore the opportunity for a Shire-hosted PhD student to be funded through a joint agreement between ECU SW and the Shire. The Dean of ECU SW has demonstrated a strong interest in partnering with the Shire and has confirmed they are in a position to supervise the PhD student for the next three years.

WALGA has provided advice regarding the governance of the proposed agreement with ECU and it is noted that while it is exempt from the Shire's Purchasing Policy, it requires a decision of Council in line with other grant funding and sponsorship arrangements the Shire enters into.

Internal Consultation

Discussions have taken place with the Director Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Manager Planning and Development and Sustainability Officer to determine resourcing requirements.

DISCUSSION / OFFICER COMMENTS

To progress this KPI, there are three options available to the Shire:

1. Allocate additional staffing resources in the budget (1 x FTE plus on costs = \$100,000 per annum approximately)
2. Engage consultants to undertake the work (costs unknown, but likely to be similar or more expensive than recruiting a staff member)
3. Sponsor and host a PhD student to undertake specific Shire-focused research (\$20,000 per annum plus in-kind support e.g. use of a desk/computer) = \$60,000

The advantages of option 3, other than the minimal cost, are:

- The student would be hosted by the Shire team and would work alongside key Shire staff, ensuring an ongoing two-way knowledge transfer and the ability to embed the learnings into the culture and processes at the Shire.
- The student would provide independent advice and be supervised independently/externally through ECU. They would not be directed by Shire staff and would be able to provide independently researched recommendations to the Shire/Council.
- The student would not be asked to perform other operational functions within the Shire and could therefore focus their efforts entirely on this specific area of work for the Shire.
- The student would engage with local community groups independently of the Shire and be able to build ongoing relationships and transfer knowledge over the three year period.
- This agreement would create a new study opportunity for a person living locally to grow their expertise and evolve their field of study through the PhD.
- The supervision of the student would be undertaken by experts at the local ECU SW, thereby providing ongoing local employment for people working within the only local tertiary educational institution in the South West region.

It is anticipated that the student will provide:

- An assessment of current and proposed actions and their suitability in order to achieve anticipated future requirements for the Shire to be 'zero carbon'.
- Suggested changes and their costs.
- A pathway for the Shire to achieve excellence in all 10 indicators of Climate Change Governance in Local Government.

As with any PhD, there will be defined milestones and reporting mechanisms in place throughout the life of the agreement.

STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

A decision of Council is required to authorise the CEO to enter into an agreement with ECU SW as proposed.

STRATEGIC PLAN / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Community Strategic Plan 2036 (CSP)

Corporate Business Plan 2020-2024

Key Result Area 3: Managing Growth Sustainably

Community Outcome: Climate change mitigation and response

Project/Activity: Implement actions from the Climate Action Plan including carbon emissions monitoring and renewable energy initiatives

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Nil

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Implications

The proposed recommendation would require a contribution by the Shire of \$20,000 per annum for three years. There is an allocation of \$15,000 for implementation of the Climate Action Plan in the 2020-2021 annual budget, \$10,000 of which could be used to cover the first six months (January to June 2021).

Long Term Financial Plan

The agreement with ECU SW would be to sponsor a three year PhD so \$20,000 per annum for three consecutive years would need to be allocated in the Long Term Financial Plan.

Whole of Lifecycle considerations

Nil

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Environmental

This proposal would assist the Shire to meet its goal of maintaining the Shire as a leader in climate change mitigation and adaptation improving our scores across the ten WALGA climate excellence categories, as per the KPI set for the CEO in the 2020-2024 Corporate Business Plan.

Social

The PhD student would engage with the local community during their research which would in turn enable knowledge transfer and encourage and promote thinking in regard to future resilience within the community.

Economic

This proposal would enable an advanced level of study and expertise to evolve within the Shire and South West Region and contribute to employment opportunities for local people through ECU SW.

This also support Council's strategic approach to supporting a sustainable economy.

ADVOCACY

Nil

IMPLICATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE RESOLUTION

Nil

VOTING REQUIREMENTS

Simple Majority

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

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2. Allocates \$20,000 per annum in the Shire's Long Term Financial Plan for three years to support the PhD student.

ADVICE TO APPLICANT / PROPONENT

Nil

ATTACHMENTS

Nil