

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA – COMMITTEES

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

59th Parliament

Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers

On 1 May 2019, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:

That this House:

An inquiry into the social and economic benefits of seeking to place disadvantaged jobseekers into sustainable employment to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 June 2020.

Your submission

The Committee's questions will focus on the terms of reference and the issues raised in submissions. This may include asking your views on:

- Challenges local labour market conditions pose for jobseekers and how council is addressing these.
- The effectiveness of existing employment services in the Gippsland region and suggestions for improvement.
- Barriers to collaboration between education providers, employers and support services and suggestions for overcoming these.
- The benefits and challenges of a place-based approach for helping disadvantaged jobseekers.
- The effectiveness of social procurement programs and ideas for improvement.
- The accessibility of public transport in West Gippsland and how councils are seeking to improve transport options for jobseekers and workers.

Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers

11:00 am – 11:30 am on Wednesday 11 December 2019

Mercure Warragul, 23 Mason Street, Warragul

Introduction

- Latrobe City welcomes the opportunity to attend this public hearing in relation to Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers that addresses the disadvantage that our job seekers are experiencing in the key areas covered by this Inquiry and its Terms of Reference.
- As you would know, Latrobe City is one of Victoria's major Regional Cities that has been in economic transition for many years, following the Hazelwood Power Station and Mine closures in 2017 and the subsequent significant Government investment in the region. With the anticipated future closures of AGL Loy Yang and Yallourn, our region is expected to continue its transition for years to come.
- There is a need to ensure that these continuing economic changes in our region do not further exacerbate the disadvantage and high levels of unemployment that parts of Latrobe City are currently experiencing, and the region is not disproportionately affected as the host to power industry and the region directly impacted by the related job losses.

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- These anticipated closures of the remaining Latrobe Valley power stations will further impact on this region's economy and sustainable employment. Therefore, we see a successful and well planned transition and diversification of Latrobe's economy, supported by capacity building of its workforce as critically important to Latrobe City's future.
- Having said all this, we also recognise that there are many complex challenges that can significantly affect people's ability to secure employment and remain in the workforce. In this community these barriers may include low educational attainment, lower socio economic ranking and limited public transport connectivity to mention a few.
- Despite its strength and resilience, the Latrobe community continues to experience higher rates of disadvantage across a broad range of indicators in parts of the city. In Latrobe City this issue is compounded by the inter-generational nature of that disadvantage, with some families experiencing second and third generation unemployment and social disadvantage.
- The average unemployment in Latrobe City is currently 5.5%, with Morwell experiencing the highest level of unemployment at 10.7%, followed by Moe/ Newborough at 7.4%.
- Latrobe City on average has a higher level of Alcohol and Drug treatment per population, hospital admissions and ambulance attendances than Victoria. At present the State Government has committed to building a rehabilitation centre in Traralgon; this facility

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will support younger people between the ages of 16-21 and is yet to be constructed.

- According to the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage Latrobe City is ranked 4th out of 79 Councils in Victoria. Demand for emergency relief and other social services in the Latrobe area is consistently high, as stated by Foodbank (2018) Australians in regional areas are 33% more likely to experience food insecurity than those living in major and capital cities.
- Latrobe City has the highest per capita rates of police attendance at family violence incidents in Victoria, three times the state average.
- Latrobe City Council has addressed these issues in its community-led Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) 2017-2021 - Living Well Latrobe to promote positive health and wellbeing in this community, and to facilitate local health planning through partnerships.
- However, as a result of these issues, for some people in our community employment is not a number one priority; basic life needs come first such as Where is my next meal coming from? Where am I sleeping tonight? How can I access a shower and clean clothes?
- In addition, for our young people limited transport connectivity remains an issue; this affects both access to employment and study.
- Another key priority with regards to our young people is to reduce the number of poorly educated young people within our community as a gateway to employment.

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- There are also young people who experience social anxiety and other mental health related conditions that prevent attendance in traditional classroom style programs. These people are unable to function and learn in traditional classrooms.
- As a result, one-on-one education options can allow youth to re-engage with education at some level. This is currently being trialled with some success in a number of educational settings including Neighbourhood Houses, where one-on-one classes focus on basic reading, writing and arithmetic.
- Similarly, successful learning can also be supported by hands on training and experience with tools, machines and equipment for those who find traditional class room training a challenge. This can also lead to qualifications and hence more employment opportunities in a highly competitive environment where young people are competing with adults with extensive work experience, particularly those who left Hazelwood.
- There are examples of successful programs that operate in this community, including **Big Brother / Big Sister Program** that provides an adult role model, increases social connectedness, improves basic life skills and improves access to education, training and sport etc.; **Melbourne City Mission – Front Yard Program** that provides free meals and access to taxi vouchers, showers and other basics; **Clemente Program** provides disadvantaged people the opportunity to access university studies and build their self-confidence as learners; and **Transition 2 Work Program** that provides financial rewards for local business to employ local people.

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- Our Aboriginal community faces its own unique challenges, including the services system in the Latrobe Valley that can be hard to navigate. A more coordinated approach is required to ensure that people can access the help they need when they need it.
- More effort is also needed to support Aboriginal children and young people in the Latrobe Valley to stay in school and be engaged in education. There are gaps in social support services that can make it challenging for many Aboriginal people to stay in education, training and employment.
- There are also reported gaps in mainstream education, training and employment services, including discrimination and poor service; generally Aboriginal-specific providers are better at supporting Aboriginal groups. There are some programs that are effective in supporting Aboriginal people, including PaCE program, Steps to the Future program and the Koorie Unit at Federation Training. These could be used as models for best practice that could be replicated elsewhere.
- Latrobe City Council has operated an Indigenous Employment Program for over 18 years. The Steps to the Future Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) is fully funded by the Federal Government through the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC) program.
- Latrobe City Council is recognised as a leading organisation for Indigenous employment and has demonstrated a track record of sustainable employment outcomes, establishing strong relationships with the Aboriginal organisations and all levels of Government across

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the Gippsland region. It has a high level of creditability within the Indigenous community, and employment and Government agencies.

- Since 2003 more than 700 people have been employed as part of this program in a diverse range of areas, averaging around an 80 to 85% retention rate. The overall outcome has had a marked impact on the quality of life for program participants as well as race relations.
- And finally, in Latrobe City, as is the case in many other regional areas, university campuses form a foundation for skills development and workforce capacity building across the community, while contributing to the region's economic, social and cultural fabric.
- In Latrobe City we are fortunate to have Federation University's regional campus in Churchill. This university is integrally linked with the overall economic and social development of this region, and the capacity building of its workforce.
- Federation University in Churchill is well positioned through its partnerships with TAFE Gippsland and with industry to determine the skills and education programmes that are needed to support businesses and workers in the region's transition. Federation University has a mission to "Transform Lives, and Enhance Communities" – this can be accomplished by providing programmes that are regionally relevant, and will help students gain secure full-time employment. It also hosts an Aboriginal Education Centre to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to refer students to services and support at Federation University and other community organisations.

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- The ability of the regional campuses and tertiary education providers like the Churchill Campus to retain and grow their student numbers and to match skills with the demand will be imperative to a successful economic transition.
- It is well known that when students study regionally, they are more likely to stay in regions – 85% of students studying at the Churchill campus are from Gippsland, predominantly Latrobe City.
- 68% of Federation University Bachelor graduates and 63% of postgraduates are employed in the region (compared with a national average of 23%).
- In conclusion, supporting access to employment and study by addressing the complex issues around social disadvantage in a collaborative way would have many far-reaching implications to this transitioning community, including equity of access, and increased community participation and pride. As always, Council invites the Government to collaborate with Latrobe City and its community to address these issues.

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SOLUTIONS:

- A more coordinated approach is needed to services to include service, education, employment providers, as well as business to support the individual to access and remain in study and employment; this support should be extended to the broader family as well.

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- More investment in early intervention programs are required for early education and secondary school retention strategies; this is particularly important for young Aboriginal people.
- The Government could introduce further measures to drive place-based approach to regional higher education so that campuses and courses can be expanded to suit the local industry and employment needs and support innovation. While we recognise that this type of planning is important, it has not been comprehensive to date.
- Government's support for the Federation University Churchill Campus to retain and grow their student numbers (including international students) and match skills with the demand will be imperative to a successful economic transition. This could be done through targeted scholarships to attract students to regional parts of Australia.
- Government's support to ensure that the regional skills development and needs are aligned and pathways from training to employment continue to be well defined and supported by long-term planning; this could include the development of flexible employment initiatives for young people.
- Improved transport connections, adequate bus timetabling and travel subsidies (or free travel) for study and employment, including to and from the Federation University Churchill Campus could assist particularly our young people.
- Council could, with sufficient funding, seek to expedite and concentrate delivery of its long-term plan for intergenerational change in health and

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social outcomes that would support employment. This could be best achieved through Government funding to accelerate the pace and breadth of actions and activities relating to the community's priorities within its MPHWP.

- **Social Procurement:** there is a need to ensure that the Indigenous and Aboriginal Procurement Policies¹ both at State and Federal level are enforced e.g. to ensure that any quotas for employment of Aboriginal people are met and based on local employment.

¹ These Policies set mandatory targets for contracting with Aboriginal businesses and for prioritising Aboriginal businesses when procuring goods, services, community services and works.

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