ORDINARY MEETING 28 OCTOBER 2026	5.5

COMMUNITY SAFETY ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

EDA | 58/6/3-01 | #7955380

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. **Endorses the Community Safety Advocacy Priorities outlined in Attachment 1 as a Tier 1 Advocacy Priority of Council in accordance with Council's Advocacy Policy; and**

2. **Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above.**

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Queensland Government

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Community safety is consistently identified as one of the most significant issues facing Cairns. Crime and perceptions of community safety influence community wellbeing, liveability, business confidence and the visitor experience.

While responsibility for policing, youth justice, courts, corrections and many social support systems rests with the Queensland Government, Council has an important role to play in advocating for policy reform, investment and service improvements that address challenges affecting Cairns and the broader Far North region.

This report presents a suite of 13 Community Safety Advocacy Priorities developed through engagement with Council's CitySafe officers, service providers, State agencies, peak industry bodies and other stakeholders. The priorities focus on reducing drivers of crime, managing impacts on Cairns communities, improving public safety outcomes and strengthening social support systems.

Council endorsement will establish these matters as Advocacy Priorities of Council and provide a clear and coordinated framework for future advocacy with the Queensland Government.

BACKGROUND:

Community safety continues to be a significant concern for many Cairns residents, businesses and visitors, and is a key determinant of liveability.

Research undertaken by id. informed decisions in 2026 identified "feeling safe" as the most important factor in determining what makes somewhere a good place to live. The research also found that Cairns residents rated their experience of feeling safe below the Queensland average and identified perceptions of safety as a key contributor to Cairns recording a lower liveability score than Queensland overall. These findings reinforce the importance of community safety to the city's liveability and community wellbeing.

Crime and community safety are related but distinct concepts. Crime refers to specific unlawful activities dealt with through the criminal justice system, while community safety encompasses the broader conditions that enable people to feel secure, protected from harm and confident in public spaces.

Responsibility for policing, courts, corrections, diversion programs and youth justice rests primarily with the Queensland Government, while Council's role is generally focused on prevention, public spaces, environmental design, community wellbeing initiatives and advocacy.

Council and individual Councillors are regularly approached by community members seeking action on crime, anti-social behaviour and related issues. While responsibility for many of these matters rests with the Queensland Government, Council has an important role in advocating on behalf of the community for policy reform, legislative change, service improvements and investment that address local concerns. Establishing Community Safety Advocacy Priorities will provide Council with a clear and coordinated framework to support this advocacy.

The current Community Safety Plan 2022-2026 is nearing completion, and Council is separately developing a renewed Community Safety Program that will focus on initiatives delivered directly by Council. This report is distinct from that work and instead focuses on those actions requiring Queensland Government leadership, policy reform, legislative change, service delivery and/or investment.

COMMENT:

Development of the Advocacy Priorities

The proposed advocacy priorities have been developed through:

- Informal engagement with funded services and State Government agencies.
- Discussions with sector and community stakeholders.
- Engagement with peak organisations including Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Advance Cairns and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce.
- Consideration of previously endorsed Council advocacy positions.
- Feedback received through Councillor workshops and discussions.
- Evaluation of existing initiatives and programs operating within Cairns and the broader Far North region.

The Queensland Government has identified crime and community safety as a key priority and is implementing a range of measures to address this difficult and complex issue. The advocacy priorities outlined in this report seek to complement these efforts by identifying practical measures that Council can pursue collaboratively with local State Members and

the Queensland Government to improve community safety outcomes in Cairns and Far North Queensland.

The proposed priorities focus on those matters requiring Queensland Government leadership, policy reform, service delivery, legislative change and/or investment and do not seek to duplicate separate work being undertaken by Council through its proposed Community Safety Program.

The advocacy priorities have been grouped under three strategic themes.

Strategic Theme 1: Reduce Impact on Cairns

A range of social, economic and geographic factors contribute to crime, anti-social behaviour and transience in Cairns. The following advocacy priorities seek to address underlying drivers of offending and improve outcomes across the broader Far North Queensland region.

- Formalise and fully resource a “Return to Community of Origin” program for people exiting custodial systems.
- Review the Local Fare Scheme.
- Continued focus on support and investment in services and case management in remote communities.
- Review and strengthen Return to Country program.
- Should the State Government proceed with a Far North Queensland youth detention centre and/or remand centre, it should be located adjacent to Lotus Glen correctional precinct.
- Strengthen local government input into liquor licensing decisions.

Strategic Theme 2: Proactively Manage the Cairns Central Business District (CBD)

The Cairns CBD serves as the region's principal commercial, civic and tourism centre and experiences a disproportionate share of public safety challenges. The following advocacy priorities seek to improve community safety, amenity and confidence within the CBD.

- Increased and embedded visible policing in the CBD.
- Cairns CBD to be activated as a Designated Business and Community Precinct.
- Robust and continuous enforcement of illegal shopfronts (primarily illegal tobacconists).
- Relocate the Cairns City Police Beat Shopfront to central city location and elevate to formal police station status.

Strategic Theme 3: Strengthen Social Supports

Long-term community safety outcomes require sustained investment in prevention, intervention and support services. The following priorities seek to strengthen the social supports available to vulnerable individuals and families.

- New state grant scheme to support NFP community clubs / groups that are victims of crime/vandalism.
- Greater focus on sustained early intervention and prevention programs for

vulnerable children, young people and families.
- Increased investment in crisis accommodation, including accommodation for domestic and family violence victims, rough sleepers and young people exiting care arrangements.

In accordance with Provision 1 of Council's Advocacy Policy, Council may choose to rank, prioritise or categorise Advocacy Priorities. As a result of the recent review of Council's Advocacy Priorities the following tiering system has been proposed:

- Tier 1 Advocacy Priorities represent matters of high priority and community impact (breadth and/or scale) requiring proactive and coordinated advocacy.
- Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities represent important, yet more targeted, matters to Council and the community that may be pursued as opportunities arise or circumstances require.

Given community safety is consistently identified as one of the most significant issues facing Cairns, it is recommended that the suite of priorities outlined in Attachment 1 be endorsed as a Tier 1 Advocacy Priority of Council.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended):

That Council:

1. Endorses the Community Safety Advocacy Priorities outlined in Attachment 1 as a Tier 1 Advocacy Priority of Council in accordance with Council's Advocacy Policy; and

2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above.

Option 2

That Council **does not** endorse the proposed Community Safety Advocacy Priorities as an Advocacy Priority of Council at this time and seeks further information from Council officers.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management

The primary risks associated with this advocacy approach are:

- Potential perceptions that Council is assuming responsibility for State Government functions.

- Potential amplification of existing concerns regarding crime and community safety.

- Risk that advocacy outcomes are not achieved despite Council's efforts.

These risks can be mitigated through clear communication regarding the respective responsibilities of Council and the Queensland Government and by maintaining a

constructive, solutions-focused advocacy approach.

Council Finance and the Local Economy

There are no direct financial implications arising from endorsement of the proposed Advocacy Priorities as implementation of advocacy relating to the matters outlined in this report are able to be covered within Council's existing approved Advocacy OPEX budget.

Community safety has direct implications for business confidence, tourism, investment attraction and broader economic development outcomes.

Improved community safety outcomes can contribute positively to liveability, visitation, investor confidence and community wellbeing. Conversely, ongoing perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour may impact economic activity and the attractiveness of Cairns as a place to live, work and visit.

Corporate and Operational Plans

The proposed advocacy priorities align with Council's strategic objectives relating to community wellbeing, economic development, advocacy, liveability and maintaining Cairns as a welcoming and safe regional centre.

Policy:

The proposed Advocacy Priorities outlined in this report have been developed in accordance with Council's Advocacy Policy, which provides a framework for establishing and pursuing Advocacy Priorities of Council.

CONSULTATION:

As outlined in the body of this report, development of the advocacy priorities has included engagement with Council's CitySafe team, service providers, State agencies, peak industry organisations and other stakeholders with experience in community safety and crime prevention.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Cairns Regional Council Community Safety Advocacy Items

Nick Masasso
Director – Economic Development & Advocacy

Attachment 1 – Cairns Regional Council Community Safety Advocacy Priorities

Key Strategic Themes

Reduce impact on Cairns

1. Formalise and fully resource a “Return to Community of Origin” program for people exiting custodial systems.
2. Review the Local Fare scheme.
3. Continued focus on support and investment in services and case management in remote communities.
4. Review and simplify Return to Country program.
5. Youth detention centre and/or remand centre to be established adjacent to Lotus Glen.
6. Strengthen local government input into liquor licensing decisions.

Proactively manage CBD

7. Increased and embedded visible policing in the CBD.
8. Cairns CBD to be activated as a Designated Business and Community Precinct.
9. Robust and continuous enforcement of illegal shopfronts (primarily illegal tobacconists).
10. Relocate the Cairns City Police Beat Shopfront to central city location and elevate to formal police station status.

Strengthen social supports

11. New state grant scheme to support NFP community clubs / groups that are victims of crime/vandalism.
12. Greater focus on sustained early intervention and prevention programs for vulnerable children, young people and families.
13. Increased investment in crisis accommodation.

#	Advocacy item	Comment/details
1.	**Formalise and fully resource a "Return to Community of Origin" program for people exiting custodial systems.**	• Post-release reintegration support is critical to reducing recidivism. • Currently fragmented/under-resourced support framework upon release. • Recent proactive efforts to return released prisoners to community has seen positive reductions in alcohol-based anti-social incidents through May and June.
2.	**Review the Local Fare scheme**	• Refocus scheme on its original intent – essential access, not travel patterns contributing to service pressure and anti-social behaviour in Cairns. • Stricter eligibility terms (e.g. Travel subsidies denied if convicted of offence related to antisocial behaviour). • Need to ensure any changes have no unintended consequences for those who are doing the right thing.
3.	**Continued focus on support and investment in services and case management in remote communities**	• Continued focus on support and investment in services and case management in remote communities. • Increase place-based essential services in remote communities to reduce transience and justice system demand due to downstream impact on Cairns. • Invest in community-based health/mental health/family support services and sustained case management.

4.	**Review and strengthen Return To Country program**	• Program needs to be simplified by funding NGO's to fully operationalise the program. • NGO's such as Anglicare have proven to be proactive and timely in getting people returned to remote communities quicker.
5.	**Youth detention centre and/or remand centre to be established adjacent to Lotus Glen**	• Should the State Government proceed with a youth detention centre and/or remand centre in Far North Queensland, Council considers a site adjacent to the existing Lotus Glen Correctional Centre to be the most appropriate location, given the existing security infrastructure, operational efficiencies and separation from residential areas.
6.	**Strengthen local government input into liquor licensing decisions**	• Council calls on the State Government to amend the Liquor Act 1992 and associated regulations to widen the range of matters local governments may provide input on in liquor licensing decisions to strengthen the weight given to that input by the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation when making licensing decisions and improve the transparency and accountability of the decision-making process. In particular, the decision-making process should clearly demonstrate and provide written response to the local governments on

		how their feedback has been considered and whether and how that feedback influenced the final decision. • Aligns with Council's endorsed motion at the LGAQ 2026 conference.
7.	**Increased and embedded visible policing in the CBD**	• CitySafe team have long observed that anti-social behaviour drops when police foot patrols are present. • Generates greater public confidence which flows on to business and visitors. • Recent operations in this regard have seen beneficial results – need ongoing commitment.
8.	**Cairns CBD to be activated as a Designated Business and Community Precinct**	• Call on the State Government to activate a Designated Business and Community Precinct in the Cairns CBD.
9.	**Robust and continuous enforcement of illegal shopfronts (primarily illegal tobacconists)**	• Higher pressure program required to deal with illegal shopfronts – not one-off raids. • Continue to shut down illegal shopfronts, proactively gather intel and shut down immediately.
10.	**Relocate the Cairns City Police Beat Shopfront to central city location (e.g. near corner of Lake and Shields St) and elevate to formal police station status**	• Permanent police presence needed in central location in CBD as opposed to current site at Lagoon. • Important that some officer presence is maintained at the Lagoon beat however.

11.	**New state grant scheme to support NFP community clubs / groups that are victims of crime/vandalism.**	• Consider two infrastructure streams:
		  ○ capital (CCTV, lighting, security)
		  ○ remediation (repairs, clean-up)

12.	**Greater focus on sustained early intervention and prevention programs for vulnerable children, young people and families**	• Increase long-term investment in evidence-based early intervention, family support and prevention programs that address the underlying causes of youth offending, including child vulnerability and maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic and family violence, disengagement from education, poor mental health, substance misuse and housing instability.
13.	**Increased investment in crisis accommodation**	• Increased accommodation access/support for key cohorts requiring support including those impacted by Domestic Family Violence, rough sleepers, young people exiting residential care.