

HUME CITY COUNCIL

**SOCIAL JUSTICE
CHARTER**

2007

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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Council recognises that every citizen of Hume City is entitled to aspire to a quality of life that allows them to freely realise their potential. This Charter goes 'beyond words' to promote a fair and just society through Council's commitment to strive for social justice and to address the social, cultural, economic and other factors that impact on the aspirations of its citizens.

As Mayor of Hume City Council it is with great pride that I am able to bring to you the 2007 *Social Justice Charter*, incorporating the *Hume Citizen's Bill of Rights* and *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*.

Council recognises that only long term sustained investment and support from all levels of government will improve the social and economic wellbeing of our community. As the first local jurisdiction to adopt a *Social Justice Charter* in 2001, it is pleasing to witness the development of *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 Act (Vic)*, recognising that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Significant action has been taken by Council since the adoption of our first *Social Justice Charter*. In 2003 Hume City Council commissioned a Poverty Enquiry to identify the key actions to reduce the causes of disadvantage in our community and has been implementing an ongoing improvement program. One of the pathways out of disadvantage is lifelong learning and we have created the nationally and internationally acclaimed Hume Global Learning Village and first library in Broadmeadows, with an e-Play area that provides free internet access at libraries across Hume City.

A range of innovative programs and services, such as 'Passport to Work' and the 'One Stop Job Shop' for residents to improve our community's access to training and employment aims to improve employment opportunities for Hume residents.

Building community cohesion encourages participation and strengthens community wellbeing. Council has an active and successful partnership with Neighbourhood Houses and local agencies to provide parent groups, volunteer activities and community programs. Council also holds a range of free community events which play a vital role in connecting the community.

The development of eight Social Justice Action Plans in 2007 further commits Council to promote respect for every citizen, encourage community participation, strengthen community wellbeing and reduce the causes of disadvantage. In the pursuit of a fair and just society these action plans incorporate targeted and measurable actions.

**CR GARY JUNGWIRTH
MAYOR**

PREAMBLE

Council pursues its vision for Hume as a prosperous, sustainable and vibrant City renowned for social justice, lifelong learning and community inclusion. This Charter, incorporating the *Citizens' Bill of Rights*, realises this vision. A city in which its citizens, together with those who work within and visit Hume, experience the highest quality of life, a healthy admiration for the environment and a genuine respect for friends, neighbours and strangers alike.

Since 2001, Hume City Council's commitment to social justice and human rights has been illustrated and embedded through the *Social Justice Charter*. As a 'living document', this Charter has been reviewed in 2003, 2004 and 2005, with the addition of the *Inaugural Citizen's Bill of Rights* and *Citizen's Bill of Rights* in 2004 and 2005 respectively. This Charter was developed after extensive review, community consultation and consideration of *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (VIC)*.

1. PURPOSE

This Charter seeks to advance a fair and just society and to promote respect for every citizen, encourage community participation, strengthen community wellbeing and reduce the causes of disadvantage.

Australians rightly expect full access to our 'human rights', often without the understanding that our rights are not generally outlined, nor specifically protected, under law. This Charter defines 'social justice' in an endeavour to improve the experience of citizens and visitors, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

The Local Government Act 2003 specifies that Hume City Councils primary objective is to

'achieve the best outcomes for the local community'.

Hume City's profile shapes Council's approach to social justice and research suggests that location specific responses are the most appropriate when approaching social justice¹. This Charter, in particular the linked Social Justice Action Plans, provides a grass roots approach to disadvantage in the City.

¹Vinson, T (2007) *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia. A report of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia*. Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia: ix

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK

‘We are all custodians of human rights and we must find our own way to do what is required’ – Mary Robinson²

This Charter is a Social Justice Policy Framework underpinned by the concept of Social Justice with four inter-connected and overlapping elements:

Principles – influence the process and actions.

Rights – The *Citizens Bill of Rights*, incorporating *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*.

Actions – includes Social Justice Action Plans and other plans.

Accountability – Monitoring of progress and Annual Reporting.

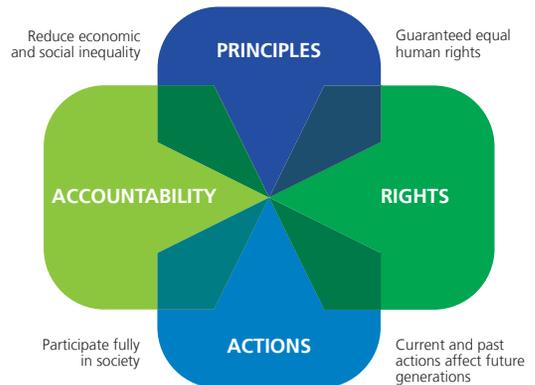
The Social Justice Framework detailed in this Charter assists Councillors and officers to apply the values in making policy and services to Hume community in the conduct of their responsibilities.

Social Justice is:

- every effort should be made to reduce economic and social inequality.
- all people should be guaranteed equal human rights.
- all people should be enabled to participate fully in society.
- a just society understands that actions and experiences of the past and current decisions and activities affect future generations.

Figure one illustrates the Social Justice Policy Framework.

FIGURE ONE: SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK



²Mary Robinson is the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What Council does, and the action it takes matters. Council plans for, and promotes and protects the enjoyment of human rights by taking action within the resources and opportunities that are reasonably available. Council will implement actions under the Guiding Principles of the Charter.

Council has and continues to act within the framework of the principles listed:

- Represent and advocate on behalf of Hume City's Citizens.
- Adopt a proactive role in supporting community initiatives.
- Create incentives that promote social and economic growth.
- Strive to strengthen community pride.
- Connect citizens with each other and their neighbourhoods.
- Foster development at individual, community and organisational level to secure sustainable and healthy future for citizens.
- Recognise welcome and build upon diversity of communities.
- Invest in community building.
- Promote partnership and collaborate in innovative ways to benefit and strengthen the community.

FIGURE TWO: SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK - PRINCIPLES



4. HUME CITY CITIZENS' BILL OF RIGHTS

'The equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'³

Every citizen of Hume City is free and equal in dignity and in rights and is entitled to aspire to the quality of life that allows them to freely realise their potential.

Hume City Council affirms that each and every one of our citizens and people who work or visit Hume City, have universal, inalienable human rights. These rights are recognised under international, Australian and Victorian law, to varying degrees, including those rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

From 1 January 2008, all public authorities, including local councils, are obliged to comply with *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*⁴. The Hume City Council is expected, under the Victorian Charter Act to:

- Act compatibly with all rights.
- Assess all rights when considering the impact of a situation on human rights.
- Ensure that no right has priority over any other right
- When determining whether a right can be reasonably limited, the interests of all the parties are balanced and considered.⁴

4.1 HUMAN RIGHTS

Hume City Council is charged with the promotion of the peace, order, and good government of Hume City: a responsibility shared as part of a three tiered system of local, state and federal governments. A responsibility that is only met in partnership.

Hume City Council recognises *the Victorian Charter Act* which also guides the development of Council policy, plans and strategies. The Victorian Charter outlines the human rights and responsibilities of all Victorians and visitors to our State, based firmly in the international covenants of human rights, with similar spirit and commitment as this Charter. In accordance with the 'dialogue' model of the legislation⁵ it is not possible to seek damages under the Victorian Charter Act, although a complaint can be made to Council regarding its actions as a 'responsible authority'.

Council's goals are to support our communities' aspirations for tolerance, dignity and quality of life and Council, acknowledges the following rights whilst exercising its responsibilities:

- The equal rights of men and women
- The right to a standard of living which ensures the dignity of each and every person
- The right to access adequate food, clothing, housing and health
- The right to learning throughout life
- The right to work
- The right to participate in public life
- The right to participate in the cultural life of the community
- The right to rest and leisure
- The right to liberty and safety
- The right to income support and social support
- The right of everyone to enjoy freedom of expression
- The right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association
- The right of protection for children and families
- The right to be respected as an individual and a member of the community without distinction or discrimination

³Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Preamble) ⁴Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Training Project (2007) Victoria University ⁵Referred to as the Victorian Charter Act subsequently ⁶Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Training Project (2007) Victoria University

4.2 THE PARTICIPATORY RIGHTS

Council acknowledges that the spirit and vigour of democracy and human rights are founded in partnerships and participation with Hume communities. Hume City Council simply cannot achieve full human rights and responsibilities for our citizens without the active participation of its residents, visitors, workers and stakeholders.

Council firmly supports and affirms the rights and responsibilities of Hume’s citizens to participate in the community and acknowledge the following Participatory Rights:

- **The right to political representation** – citizens have the right to stand for election and support the person of their choice. Council will continue to:
 - > Promote awareness of its citizens’ right to stand for election and be involved in government at a local (or other) level.
 - > Ensure that electoral processes are, as far as practicable, appropriate to the abilities of Hume City’s diverse communities.

- **The right to vote** – under the *Local Government Act 2003* citizens have the right to vote in local government elections. This is an essential foundation in a healthy democracy and one which we actively encourage. We will continue to encourage participation in this right and:
 - > Promote awareness of the right to apply to enrol to vote, particularly for young people and those from a non-English speaking background.
 - > Assist applicants to successfully enrol to vote.

- **The right to participate in public life** – it is important that citizens actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Hume City Council will continue to support this right through:
 - > Consultation on major policies, plans and projects, including ensuring consultations at times are reasonably convenient and in venues that are accessible.
 - > Support for and active engagement with advisory networks, forums and Taskforces.

- **The right to access information** – it is important that citizens access information about policies, programs and decisions that affect them and their wider community. Hume City Council will continue support this right by:
 - > Open and accessible Ward and Council meetings, that are well advertised and at times/places that are accessible.
 - > Timely and accessible publication of meeting agenda and minutes, plans, policy, reports and budgets.
 - > Regular publication of relevant and useful information through newsletters, public notices, the local newspaper and the council’s internet site.

- **The right to accountability** – it is important that citizens can hold decision makers accountable for their decisions and that decisions made are transparent. Council will support this right by:
 - > The Annual Council Report.
 - > Annual Social Justice Report;
 - Inclusive of the Victorian Charter Act.
 - Ongoing monitoring of progress towards a fair and just society via community wellbeing indicators and participation data.
 - > Apply the Human Rights Assessment tool for new policies, plans and strategies.

FIGURE THREE: BILL OF RIGHTS AS AN ELEMENT OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK



5. COMMITMENT TO ACTION

‘in pursuit of a fair and just society’

Hume City Council acknowledges that both targeted and general Actions are needed to encourage participation, strengthen community wellbeing and address disadvantage.

The Commitment to Action responds to social justice issues that have been identified by community consultation, Hume profile data and the *Tackling Poverty Together: An Inquiry into Poverty* Report. Social justice issues can be viewed as either a group of interconnected circumstances,⁷ or determined by the characteristic of the person. Social Justice Issues relevant to the Hume community are:

- Social distress⁷
- Health⁷
- Community safety⁷
- Economic⁷
- Affordable Housing
- Social Connectedness
- Alcohol, Other Drugs, Problem gambling
- Respect for difference
- Low Income
- Access to Recreation
- Education
- Disability
- Transport

5.1 SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLANS

The *Social Justice Charter* takes sustained action on a set of social justice issues through Action Plans to enhance community wellbeing. The action plans developed demonstrate appropriate concern of issues of social justice, inclusion and community wellbeing by ‘going beyond words’ to implement plans of action in the pursuit of a fair and just society.

Action Plans will be developed systematically under this Charter with a focus on participation in opportunities that promote and protect community wellbeing, social justice data collection and performance measurement. Hume City Council has, adopted eight new action plans during 2007. The Action Plans are:

- Young People
- People with Disabilities
- Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders
- Community Empowerment
- One City, Many Cultures
- Affordable Housing
- Alcohol, Other Drugs and Gambling
- Poverty

Action Plans have a consistent structure comprising:

- **Actions grouped into themes of:**
 - > **Inform** – use of education or informational resources or strategies;
 - > **Access and Opportunity** – reducing or removing barriers to participation;

- > **Participate** – specific activities and programs; and,
- > **Advocate** – working with partners to affect change outside of Council.

- **Include performance measures** – which as best as practicable – are designed to be outcome-oriented (as opposed to output or activity measures); and
- **Will be implemented** – over a three to four year period with a review of each action plan being conducted annually and reported to the community.

Additional action plans will be developed if a significant social justice issue emerges.

5.2 POLICIES, STRATEGIES & PLANS

To enhance social justice outcomes in the areas of learning, transport and employment there will be a general plan or strategy. These and other Council plans will specify the relationship with the principles, rights and desired social justice outcomes. Council will:

- Take targeted and general approaches to addressing social justice issues.
- Refer to Social Justice principles, rights, outcomes and the obligations of the Victorian Charter Act in the development of future policies, strategies and plans.

Key responsibilities, in accordance with our Federal system of Government for the provision of transport, education, health services and housing reside with other levels of government. Hume City Council will work with our colleagues at all levels of government, corporations, business and community organisations in pursuit of a fair and just society.

FIGURE FOUR: SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK - SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLANS



⁷Vinson, T. *op cit.*

6. COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY

‘Let there be justice for all’ – Nelson Mandela⁸

Hume City Council considers accountable governance occurs if there is a review of activities that includes evaluation of effectiveness of the program and regular and transparent reporting of actions and decisions. In this Charter, accountability is acknowledged as a right and an element of the Social Justice Policy Framework.

When assessing social justice actions indicators of community wellbeing provide a multi – dimensional measure for evaluation and accountability.

The indicators of community wellbeing are:-

- A strong sense of belonging and connection to the community in which one lives
- A respect for and a welcoming and celebration of people from diverse backgrounds
- A responsiveness to disadvantage and difficulties that arise
- A network of support systems
- The active practice of neighbourliness and hospitality
- A belief by the community in their capacity to influence decision makers
- A sense of ownership and enjoyment of public space.

6.1 ANNUAL SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT

Council is committed to publishing a Social Justice Report annually. The pledge that the Charter be a ‘living’ document ensures the continued evolution of the Charter to reflect the community experience and be responsive to emerging issues.

The social justice action plans annual reporting on the delivery of actions includes the collection of participatory data. Data will include the collection of level of participation by;

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with disabilities
- Low income earners
- People from multicultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds

It is acknowledged that some needs for inclusion cannot be measured in participation data because of the nature of the social justice issues involved such as harms associated with alcohol, other drugs and gambling and social isolation.

6.2 SOCIAL JUSTICE ASSESSMENT TOOL

Hume City Council will use the principles of social justice and human rights to evaluate all of our policies, strategies and plans. Through the use of a comprehensive Social Justice Assessment tool we will ensure that our policies, strategic plans and programs include universal, inalienable human rights for our citizens or visitors in Hume City.

6.3 TRIANNUAL SOCIAL JUSTICE CHARTER REVIEW

This is a ‘living’ Charter that evolves through ongoing dialogue with our citizens, in response to their emerging needs. Council commits to reviewing this Charter every three years to ensure reflection and response to community aspirations and experiences.

Figure Four below illustrates accountability as an element in the Social Justice Policy Framework.

FIGURE FIVE: SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK - ACCOUNTABILITY



⁸Independent on Sunday (14 May 1994) Nelson Mandela, South African Statesman and former president.

HumeLink

Hume City Council's
multilingual telephone information service.
General enquiries: Telephone 9205 2200

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Hume City Council

1079 Pascoe Vale Road, Broadmeadows
PO Box 119 Dallas Victoria 3047
Telephone 03 9205 2200 Facsimile 03 9309 0109

email@hume.vic.gov.au
www.hume.vic.gov.au

