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AUDIT FINDINGS HIGHLIGHT A NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT

Strathbogie Shire Council has recently participated in a thorough audit process undertaken by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) which has provided a number of recommendations on ways to improve its fraud and corruption controls.

Strathbogie Shire Mayor Cr Amanda McClaren said whilst the VAGO audit concluded there was no fraud or corruption detected at Council, it did identify areas where improvement is required on controls to prevent, detect and respond to potential fraud and corruption.

"Council recognises the important role VAGO has to play in raising the standard of local government and improving the provision of services and utilisation of public money," Mayor McClaren explained.

"The VAGO audit process allowed for Council staff to review and provide feedback to the report and implement improvements to controls and processes; however Councillors are yet to be briefed and discuss the report."

Following the findings of the audit, the organisation has embarked on a comprehensive review of existing policies and procedures, particularly those that relate to discretionary expenditure and fuel and credit card use, to ensure total transparency and closer scrutiny of all claims.

Strathbogie Shire Council Chief Executive Officer, Steve Crawcour said these reviews include the provision of awareness training for staff on the updated policies and procedures.

"We welcomed the opportunity to work proactively with VAGO in the conduct of its audit which we see as a catalyst for positive change in the organisation," Mr Crawcour said.

"Ongoing improvements will continue to be introduced, reviewed and monitored as we work closely with staff to ensure diligent monitoring and a commitment to best-practice transparency across the organisation."

The organisation has implemented a number of the recommendations from the report and will be actioning all recommendations under the guidance of Council.

Council's independent audit committee, comprised of three community members, a councillor, a VAGO representative and internal auditor, will also ensure diligent monitoring and a commitment to best-practice transparency across the organisation," Mr Crawcour said.

"With approximately 80 percent of our staff living in the shire, our organisation is acutely aware of community expectations in relation to ratepayer funds and we will continue to strive to improve our systems and processes to meet our ratepayers' expectations."

Council is confident it will emerge from this process a better organisation with a stronger focus on the needs and expectations of ratepayers.

Whilst only four councils were randomly selected to participate in the audit process, all Victorian councils will benefit from reviewing their policies and procedures by reference to VAGO's recommendations and the conclusions contained in the audit report.

-ENDS-

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