

Report to Council**Agenda item 7.1****Opportunity for international engagement, Councillor Philip Le Liu, China and Thailand, November 2023****31 October 2023****Presenter:** Councillor Philip Le Liu**Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Councillor Philip Le Liu's proposal to visit China to participate in the Australian China Youth Dialogue (ACYD) and a program of meetings aimed at building relationships and links which foster stronger economic and cultural ties with Melbourne.
2. Councillor Le Liu has been invited to attend the 13th ACYD and will be one of 15 Australian delegates selected to participate in a forum of emerging leaders in Australia and China who are interested in furthering relations between the two nations. Since 2010, the ACYD has alternated between major cities in Australia and China and was held in Melbourne in 2015, which City of Melbourne (CoM) also sponsored. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Gough Whitlam becoming the first Australian Prime Minister to visit the People's Republic of China in 1973 and will see the first visit by an Australian Prime Minister to China in seven years.
3. The 2023 ACYD will be held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province between 17 and 20 November 2023. Whilst there, Councillor Le Liu will take the opportunity to engage with officials at Chengdu and Sichuan to reciprocate visits to Melbourne, including a recent delegation led by the Mayor of Chengdu, to reinvigorate economic ties. Chengdu and Melbourne enjoyed an economic partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding between 2017 and 2020.
4. In May 2023, Council approved a new International Engagement Framework. The Framework seeks to position Melbourne internationally by further building and consolidating the city's reputation as a leading and preferred destination for international tourism and education. Before returning to Melbourne, Councillor Le Liu proposes to visit Thailand at the suggestion of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Melbourne's Honorary Consul of Thailand, in preparation of Melbourne and the Prime Minister hosting leaders from Southeast Asia's ASEAN bloc in March 2024 for a special summit to commemorate 50 years of relations with Australia.

Key issues

5. Participation by Councillor Le Liu in the ACYD will provide a valuable opportunity to establish connections and foster relations on behalf of CoM. The timing of Councillor Le Liu's proposed visit to Chengdu will provide an opportunity to advance Melbourne as a preferred destination for economic investment, international tourism and education. It will occur at a time which sees Australia experiencing warming of relations and easing of restrictions. Positioning and timing are important in international relations when seeking to build on relationships and maximise opportunities. The Premier of Victoria visited Chengdu, Sichuan in March 2023 and at national level, the Australian Prime Minister is visiting China in early November.
6. To provide context, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Chengdu amounted to \$450 billion in 2022. At a Victorian level, in 2019, 675,000 Chinese visitors spent 18.4 million nights and \$3.4 billion on trips to Victoria. There are more than 140,000 international students in Melbourne and those from China make up almost 25 per cent.
7. At a local level, the Mayor of Chengdu recently led a 12 person delegation to Melbourne in mid-October to review the Melbourne-Chengdu strategic partnership and potential collaboration in areas of trade, investment, technology, innovation, education, sports, tourism and culture. This was the second visit by the Mayor and Councillor Le Liu plans to reciprocate the visit and proposes to include participation by Australian diplomatic and consular officials, including Victorian Government representatives. This will be the first official CoM visit to Chengdu.

8. Councillor Le Liu will undertake commitments aimed at promoting ongoing exchanges and partnerships in the fields of tourism, events, research, education and science. The discussions will build on and advance opportunities raised during the Mayor of Chengdu's visit to Melbourne and will include the following:
 - 8.1. Generating interest in Melbourne as a preferred tourism destination through national campaigns. This will include meetings with the Director General of Chengdu, Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcast-TV and Tourism to promote the Australia Tourism Exchange in 2024 to be held in Melbourne and generating interest amongst Chengdu-based tourism businesses to participate. The Tourism Australia 2023 China campaign was launched in Chengdu.
 - 8.2. Participation in events associated with the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and leveraging direct flights to Melbourne. Sichuan Airlines have increased direct flights between Chengdu and Melbourne to five days per week since September 2023.
 - 8.3. Strengthening education exchange and research collaboration in line with the agreement covering the Victoria-Sichuan sister state relationship. As part of this, Councillor Le Liu proposes to visit the Chengdu Research Base and explore exchange and partnership opportunities supporting animal science.
9. Following deliberations associated with development of CoM's International Engagement Framework, representatives from the Thai community, namely Thai Chamber of Commerce and Melbourne's Honorary Consul of Thailand, have suggested Councillor Le Liu visit Thailand to explore opportunities for Melbourne through stronger engagement as Thailand is not one of the countries listed in CoM's International Engagement Framework. Thailand is the second largest economy by GDP in ASEAN and Melbourne will host leaders from the ASEAN bloc in March 2024 for a Special Commemorative Summit to mark 50 years of relations. The cost of visit to Thailand will be covered personally by Councillor Le Liu.
10. The cost to CoM of Councillor Le Liu's travel will be a maximum of \$6000 which will cover return airfare from Melbourne to China. Other costs will be jointly covered by the ACYD and personally by Councillor Le Liu.

Recommendation

11. That Council approves Councillor Le Liu's proposed travel to China for participation in the Australian China Youth Dialogue and other meetings with officials, including a visit to Thailand, between 11 and 28 November 2023 at a maximum cost to Council of \$6000.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 3 of 3)

Supporting Attachment

Finance

1. The costs associated with travel proposed by Councillor Le Liu will be jointly funded.
2. Council will cover cost associated with airfare up to an amount of \$6000. The ACYD will cover accommodation costs during the program. All other costs will be personally covered by Councillor Le Liu.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

4. In developing this proposal, no occupational health and safety issues or opportunities have been identified.
5. In undertaking international travel, Councillor Le Liu will adhere to and be guided by international health, safety and security measures including those identified by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Relation to Council policy

6. The Executive Officer Councillor Liaison has confirmed that the travel proposal accords with the requirements of the travel guidelines outlined in the Councillor Expenses Policy.
7. The trip aligns with Major Initiative 8 in the Council Plan 2021–25 ('Review and optimise Melbourne's international relationships') and the International Engagement Framework.

Environmental sustainability

8. The carbon emission resulting from air travel to China and Thailand will be offset with the purchase of credits.