



Merri-bek
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday 8 April 2026

Commencing 6.30 PM

Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre,
90 Bell Street, Coburg

Language Link

This is the Agenda for the Council meeting.
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Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the City of Merri-bek

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek, and pays respect to their elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Information about Council Meetings

These notes have been developed to help people better understand Council meetings. All meetings are conducted in accordance with Council's Governance Rules.

WELCOME The Mayor, who chairs the meeting, formally opens the meeting.

APOLOGIES Where a Councillor is not present, their absence is noted in the minutes of the meeting. Council may also approve leaves of absence in this part of the meeting.

DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS INTERESTS A Councillor has a duty to disclose any direct or indirect financial or other interests, they may have in any matter to be considered by Council that evening.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES The minutes of the previous meeting are put before Council to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the record.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS At each Council Meeting provision of 10 minutes will be made in the Agenda for the Mayor and Councillors to acknowledge and recognise achievements of local individuals and organisations; and raise matters considered important to Council.

PETITIONS Council receives petitions from citizens on various issues. Council formally accepts petitions at Council meetings.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME This is an opportunity (30 minutes), for citizens of Merri-bek to raise questions with Councillors.

COUNCIL REPORTS Council officers prepare detailed reports, which are considered by Councillors and a Council position is adopted on the matters considered. The Mayor can invite firstly Councillors, secondly Officers, and then citizens in attendance to identify Council reports which should be given priority by the meeting and considered in the early part of the meeting.

NOTICES OF MOTION A motion which has been submitted to the Chief Executive Officer no later than 12 pm (noon) 10 business days prior to the meeting which is intended to be included in the agenda. The motion should outline the policy, financial and resourcing implications.

NOTICE OF RESCISSION A Councillor may propose a motion to rescind a resolution of the Council, provided the previous resolution has not been acted on, and a notice is delivered to the CEO or delegate setting out the resolution to be rescinded and the meeting and date when the resolution was carried. If a motion for rescission is lost, a similar motion may not be put before the Council for at least one month from the date it was last lost, unless the Council resolves that the notice of motion be re-listed at a future meeting.

FORESHADOWED ITEMS This is an opportunity for Councillors to raise items proposed to be submitted as Notices of Motion at future meetings.

URGENT BUSINESS The Chief Executive Officer or Councillors, with the approval of the meeting, may submit items of Urgent Business (being a matter not listed on the agenda) but requiring a prompt decision by Council.

CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS Whilst all Council meetings of Council are open to the public, Council has the power under the *Local Government Act 2020* to close its meeting to the public in certain circumstances which are noted where appropriate on the Council Agenda. Where this occurs, members of the public leave the Council Chamber or Meeting room while the matter is being discussed.

CLOSE OF MEETING The Mayor will formally close the meeting and thank all present.

NEXT MEETING DATE The next Council meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 May 2026 commencing at 6.30 pm, in the Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street, Coburg. The next Planning and Related Matters meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 April 2026 commencing at 6.30 pm.

WELCOME

1. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Cr Davidson has sought a leave of absence for the period 7 April to 11 April 2026 (inclusive).

2. DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. MINUTE CONFIRMATION

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 11 March 2026 and the Special Council Meetings held 25 March, 26 March and 27 March 2026 be confirmed.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS

5. PETITIONS

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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9. NOTICE OF RESCISSION

Nil

10. FORESHADOWED ITEMS

11. URGENT BUSINESS

7. COUNCIL REPORTS

7.1 DOG WALKING IN MERRI-BEK PROJECT

Acting Director City Infrastructure, Greg Rodwell

Open Space and Environment

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the community engagement outcomes of the Stage 1 pilot Dog Walking in Merri-bek project summarised in Attachment 1 of this report and thanks the community for their significant contributions throughout the six-month pilot period of engagement.
2. Endorses the recommendations arising from the six-month pilot program across seven of eight identified parks (Attachment 2) including interventions for improved amenities and signage.
3. Acknowledges that recommendations arising from the Tate Reserve pilot will be deferred to enable specific site issues to be worked through.
4. Allocates \$220,000 from the Public Resort and Recreation Land Fund in 2026/27 in the draft budget to provide for improved amenities and signage related to the recommendations in Stage 1.
5. Receives a report by mid-2027 outlining a proposed stage 2.

REPORT

Executive Summary

This report outlines the key outcomes, learnings, and recommendations arising from the six-month stage 1 pilot Dog Walking in Merri-bek Project. Since the July 2025 Council Meeting, Council officers have spoken with over 1,100 community members across 80 parks as well as reviewed feedback from 8 engagement pop-ups as well as feedback via the Conversations Merri-bek website. The community were generally very supportive of the changes in 7 of the 8 Pilot parks. Tate Reserve remains a challenge and is subject to further stakeholder engagement. While some concerns remain about the modest reduction of the dog off lead areas in Gilpin Park and Fleming Park, the other improvements to the parklands have been welcomed.

Since 2020, dog ownership has increased steadily across the municipality. This has resulted in many positive community outcomes. And while the majority of dog owners remain responsible, there is growing concern from both dog owners and non-dog owners about increasing poor behaviour and a disregard for the Local Law.

The Pilot changes in Stage 1 have provided additional learnings including: (i) the need for some changes to existing zoning and new dog off lead areas to improve legibility, protect waterways and reduce conflict; (ii) ongoing investment in amenities (bins, water, seating, shade, and fencing etc.); and (iii) improved communication of clearly mapped dog off leash areas and reminders of the responsibilities of dog ownership needs to be provided to dog owners and displayed in our parks.

This project continues to represent an important opportunity to ensure our open spaces remain safe, inclusive, and sustainable for all members of the Merri-bek community.

Previous Council Decisions

Dog walking in Merri-bek - Consultation Summary and Stage 1 Pilot Implementation – 9 July 2025

That Council:

1. *Revises Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 so that they reflect changes to Tate Reserve to increase the area zoned as No Dogs, still retaining a corridor for Dog Off-Leash along the western side of the No Dogs area.*
2. *Adopts the Council Order at Revised Attachment 1 (Dog Off-Leash and Dog Prohibited Areas) and directs for it to be published with tracked changes accepted in the Victorian Government Gazette with an effective date of 28 July 2025.*
3. *Endorses the implementation of the Stage 1 pilot program across eight identified parks the support the Council Order to trial draft principles and interventions for improved management of dog access (Revised Attachment 2) for a minimum of six months, utilising capital funding of \$150,000 set aside in 2025/26 for this purpose.*
4. *Notes that the community has participated significantly in consultation on Stage 1 of the Dog Walking in Merri-bek project summarised in Attachment 3 of this report and that officers will continue to engage with the community during the pilot.*
5. *Receives a future report at the conclusion of the Stage 1 pilot on outcomes, learnings and future recommendations as part of the preparation of Stage 2 of the Dog Walking in Merri-bek project (remaining off leash reserves).*

1. Policy Context

Community Vision

The Council Plan 2025 to 2029 sets out Council's and our community's vision for the future in Merri-bek. Key objectives and strategies related to this report include:

- 1.1: Greening and beautifying our public and open spaces
- 1.2: Restore and renature open spaces, creek corridors and waterways that create a vibrant network of interconnected green corridors, enhance wildlife habitats and promote biodiversity.
- 1.3: Inspire and activate community connection and care for nature, ecological sustainability
- 1.5: Work closely with Traditional Owners and local First Nations People to care for Country
- 3.1: Build new and revitalised local parks that promote access to open space close to home, catering for all needs and abilities.
- 5.3: Coordinate advocacy efforts to pursue funding, policy changes and projects that achieve positive community outcomes, by collaborating with community members, peak bodies, and other levels of government.
- 5.5: Strengthen engagement through greater use of inclusive communications catering to Merri-bek's diverse audiences; and through education, targeted consultations, storytelling, and closing the loop to community.
- 5.7: Co-design meaningful consultation of local place initiatives.

Open Space Strategy

Council adopted its current Open Space Strategy in 2024. The following strategic directions are relevant to this report:

- Ensuring our open space network is adaptive, biodiverse, cooling, healthy and resilient.
- Providing open space for everyone.

Planning Scheme

Council's open spaces are identified as highly sensitive land uses. Merri-bek's waterway parklands are covered by both the Environmental Significance Overlay and Significant Landscape Overlay which provide the statutory, environmental, and visual justification for Council decisions regarding dog access, such as creating fenced "no-go" zones, maintaining riparian buffers, and managing the overall intensity of recreation in waterway corridors. The objectives of the planning scheme, specifically the Environmental Significance Overlay and Significant Landscape Overlay, provide the legal framework for Councils to manage waterways by controlling land use in sensitive riparian areas. These overlays protect waterway health—and, by extension, manage the impacts of dogs—by maintaining vegetative buffers, preventing erosion, and managing public access to sensitive habitat.

Other strategic plans

Council has identified opportunities to improve dog walking in open spaces through area-specific planning processes and wider policy initiatives, including:

- Brunswick Central Parklands Plan
- Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan
- Fleming Park Masterplan
- Domestic Animal Management Plan

The use of open space, particularly in relation to dog walking is of high interest to the community. The level of community engagement undertaken during the engagement period for Stage 1 is considered to have met Council's aspirations as outlined in the Community Engagement Policy, which is a requirement under the Local Government Act 2020. The comprehensive engagement process undertaken to date is further detailed in Section 4 of this report. The Community Engagement Report (**Attachment 1**) details the community engagement on the proposed interventions for Stage 1 of the *Dog Walking in Merri-bek* project (**Attachment 2**).

2. Background

Merri-bek currently has 57 designated dog off-leash reserves and 8 newly constructed fenced dog parks. These open spaces support a range of users and uses.

Recent strategic plans, including those for Brunswick and Fawkner, aim to maintain access for dog walkers while balancing this with other community needs. The updated Open Space Strategy highlights that open spaces must support multiple, and sometimes competing, uses. However, learnings and community feedback through Stage 1 indicate that open space is not always being shared appropriately and that there is a need to better manage these spaces so that all users can enjoy them safely and respectfully.

Key drivers for this engagement project include:

- A 25% rise in registered dog numbers between 2018 and 2025
- Community feedback during the Open Space Strategy Refresh
- The review of the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) in 2025/26

- The outdated Council Order for dog off-leash areas (last updated in 2006)
- Strategic planning across local parks and reserves

The Dog Walking in Merri-bek arose from community engagement on the Open Space Strategy. The Project commenced in March 2025 exploring how we can better manage and share open space between dog walkers and other users, such as families, cyclists, and sporting clubs. Eight pilot parks were selected to help Council understand:

- How open space can support high-density and shared use
- Trial solutions to common issues in popular parks
- Educate the public about responsible dog walking
- Evaluate community sentiment around new interventions

The Merri-bek municipality stands out in comparison to its neighbouring councils when it comes to dog ownership and the provision of off-leash areas. Merri-bek currently has 13,332 registered dogs across 11,321 households (around 14% of total households) supported by 57 designated off-leash areas.

Municipality	Registered Dogs	Dogs/km²	Off-leash Areas
Merri-bek	13,332	279	57
Darebin	9,235	173	30
Moonee Valley	9,794	227	11
Yarra	6,531	334	28
Melbourne	4,473	119	17

Merri-bek off-leash areas include 8 fenced parks, shared sports reserves, and general open spaces—each presenting different benefits and challenges for shared use.

3. Issues

Community impact

Feedback gathered during Stage 1 of the Dog Walking Project echoed similar issues identified during engagement on the Open Space Strategy, namely that:

- Dog walking is one of the most common uses of open space offering significant community physical and mental health benefits as well as improving a general sense of safety when visiting parks
- There is a noticeable disregard for the Local Law in terms of dogs off lead in on lead parks, on shared paths, and in and around playgrounds and picnic areas as well as responsible dog ownership (not picking up dog poo and lack of control or recall).
- Households owning dogs make up 14% of the community with 86% of households not owning a dog.
- Both dog owners and non-dog owners are increasingly disappointed by a minority of dog owners
- Many residents are uncomfortable around dogs, especially in playgrounds or where dogs are not supposed to be off-leash.
- Environmental groups, including Friends of Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek, have raised concerns about dogs impacting biodiversity and wildlife, particularly in sensitive areas.

- Specific requests were made for more:
 - Education and enforcement of dog owner responsibilities
 - Improved signage and communication about on-leash requirements
 - Fenced and purpose-built dog parks
 - Dog waste bags and bins

Key issues raised include:

- Dogs interrupting formal sports games and training
- Dog behaviour (digging, waste) affecting enjoyment of parks by others
- Off-leash dogs in playgrounds and running onto shared paths and causing injury or distress
- Dogs intimidating park users or rushing up to other dogs and people
- Wildlife disturbance and attacks, particularly along the Merri Creek corridor

It is important to note that only 14% of households have registered dogs and yet dog walkers are one of the most common users of our parks. It is important that Council continues to improve the community's perception of safety and sense of feeling welcome when they access and use our parks while protecting sensitive environmental values of our waterways.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no specific climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Legal and risk considerations

Local Government Act 2020

The Local Government Act 2020 and Merri-bek's Local Laws provide requirements and guidance for how Merri-bek plans, delivers and manages our open space. The Local Government Act articulates that "the role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community" (section 8 (1)). The Local Laws provide clarity about responsibilities in our open spaces, including on-leash dog areas in our parks and playgrounds and protection of our natural environment in open spaces.

Domestic Animals Act 1994

Section 26 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* allows Victorian Councils to prohibit dogs from certain public places within the municipality and a requirement for dogs to be on leash at all times, unless in a designated off-leash area as named by the Council.

Merri-bek Council has an existing Order endorsed in March 2006 which specifies these requirements. The Order was amended in July 2025 to include the changes outlined in the Stage 1 pilot and this Order will be reviewed as part of a later Stage 2 Council Report.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have given consideration to the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and there are no relevant implications for the proposed interventions of Stage 1. It is noted that Council has conducted extensive community engagement as part of this process, ensuring the views of the community have been considered in the proposals outlined in this report.

4. Community consultation and engagement

The Engagement Summary at **Attachment 1** outlines key community feedback during the six-month Pilot period from August 2025 to February 2026. Most responses came from dog owners, who strongly value open space for wellbeing, community connection, connection to nature and socialising. At the same time, concerns were raised about:

- Lack of clarity about when and where dogs are allowed in shared spaces
- Absence of education and enforcement
- Conflict between dogs
- Irresponsible dog owners
- Prevalence of dog poo and a lack of bins
- Lack of investment in amenities for dogs and dog walkers
- Conflict between dogs and cyclists
- Off-leash dogs disrupting sporting events or users
- Wildlife disturbance in natural areas

Community members suggested clearer signage about sports schedules and better enforcement to support shared use. Additional mapping online, through targeted registration mail outs and in parks clearly showing on and off lead areas. Despite Stage 1 being framed as a learning opportunity through the pilot sites, there are concerns about the changes being perceived as restrictions on dog owners.

The range of consultation methods applied during engagement included informal discussions with dog owners and park visitors, online feedback, direct emails and pop-up meetings in the eight pilot parks.

Stage 1 Pilot parks:

- Gilpin Park, Brunswick
- Wylie Reserve, Brunswick West
- Fleming Park, Brunswick East
- Harmony Park, Coburg
- Robinson Reserve, Coburg
- Tate Reserve, Coburg
- Lorne Street Reserve, Fawkner
- GE Clarke Reserve, Glenroy

The interventions trialled in these 8 Pilot parks included:

- a) Zoned Reserves: Off-leash and on-leash areas within larger parks
- b) Designation Change: Convert selected on-leash reserves to partly off-leash
- c) Shared Timed Access – Sports Reserves: Off-leash use outside sporting times
- d) Shared Timed Access – Peak Use: Off-leash access before 9am and after 5pm
- e) Habitat Protection Zones: Restricted or on-leash access only
- f) Improved Lighting and Activation: Enhanced safety in low-light areas
- g) Public Awareness Campaigns: Targeted signage and education

Overall community engagement remained positive on the project with the exception of Tate Reserve in Coburg which remains a challenge. An independently facilitated workshop is planned with stakeholders to work through these challenges and as such, outcomes for Tate Reserve will be included in a separate report to Council at a future date. Some minor changes have been suggested to Gilpin Park relating to the enclosed dog park.

Feedback related to the pilot sites has resulted in the recommended endorsement of the trial changes for all 7 parks (**Attachment 2**). The community engagement also resulted in rich feedback from the community on Merri-bek's other 240 open spaces. This feedback is being reviewed and will inform the next stage of proposed changes in Stage 2 Dog Walking in Merri-bek.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The estimated costs for implementing the Stage 1 pilot program in the 7 parks is \$220,000 during the 2026-27 financial year including:

- Permanent fencing for the Lorne Street enclosed dog park
- Additional seating and water points for all 7 pilot parks
- Installation of educational, enforcement and dog on and off leash park zoning signage
- Accessibility and legibility works with gravel paths and some garden beds to clarify dog on and off lead zones.

Subject to Council endorsement this will be included in the draft budget funded from the Public Resort and Recreation Land Fund.

7. Implementation

Subject to endorsement by Council, officers will begin the implementation of the Stage 1 Pilot recommendations from July 2026 as detailed in the Dog Walking in Merri-bek Stage 1 (**Attachment 2**). Not all interventions will be able to commence immediately and will be subject to normal procurement processes. Implementation will commence in a staggered manner and continue from July 2026 through to early 2027.

Council officers will commence the process of uploading clear maps on Council's website and, where required, in parks, to improve community understanding of the location of all parks with dog off leash areas and fenced dog parks. These maps should also clearly identify all shared paths, playgrounds and waterways where restrictions apply.

Council officers are reviewing the engagement findings relating to other parks and will present recommendations for Stage 2 to together with the resolution of Tate Reserve at a future Council meeting.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| 1 | Engagement Summary Report April 2026 | D26/126048 |
| 2 | Dogs-Off-Leash Stage1 Report April 2026 | D26/126024 |



Dog Walking in Merri-bek

Community Engagement Report

April 2026



Introduction

We wanted to understand the community's experience of the pilot changes to 8 parks as part of stage 1 of the dog walking in Merri-bek.

Between 1 August 2025 and 28 February 2026, we undertook an extensive program of engagement to seek feedback from the Merri-bek community on the pilot changes and interventions in eight parks for the dog walking in Merri-bek project.

These parks included:

1. Gilpin Park, Brunswick
2. Wylie Reserve, Brunswick West
3. Fleming Park, Brunswick East
4. Harmony Park, Coburg
5. Robinson Reserve, Coburg
6. Tate Reserve, Coburg
7. Lorne Street Reserve, Fawkner
8. GE Clarke Reserve, Glenroy

The interventions in each of the eight pilot parks aimed to assist Council plan for the growing number of dogs in Merri-bek, by reviewing how our parks and reserves are used, and to ensure accessibility for all users.

There were several ways that the community could provide feedback on the draft principles and interventions:

- Online survey via Conversations Merri-bek
- 9 in-person pop-up events
- Stakeholder feedback through targeted workshops
- Submissions via email
- Children's survey
- Petitions that were submitted to Council

The range of consultation methods applied during engagement included informal discussions with dog owners and park visitors, online feedback, direct emails and pop-up meetings.

Due to the significant community engagement (over 3,000 submissions) during stage 1, engagement in the six-month Pilot required registration on Council's Conversations Merri-bek website. In addition to the website, the community provided feedback on the project and pilot park interventions:

- 185 officer site visits to 80 parks (roughly 320 hours)
- Officer conversations with over 1,100 residents
- Online feedback via Conversations Merri-bek
- 8 in-person pop-up events
- Over 200 email submissions and replies

We received feedback from 1,182 participants and more than 200 written contributions through these methods. Most responses came from dog owners, who strongly value open space for wellbeing, community connection, connection to nature and socializing.

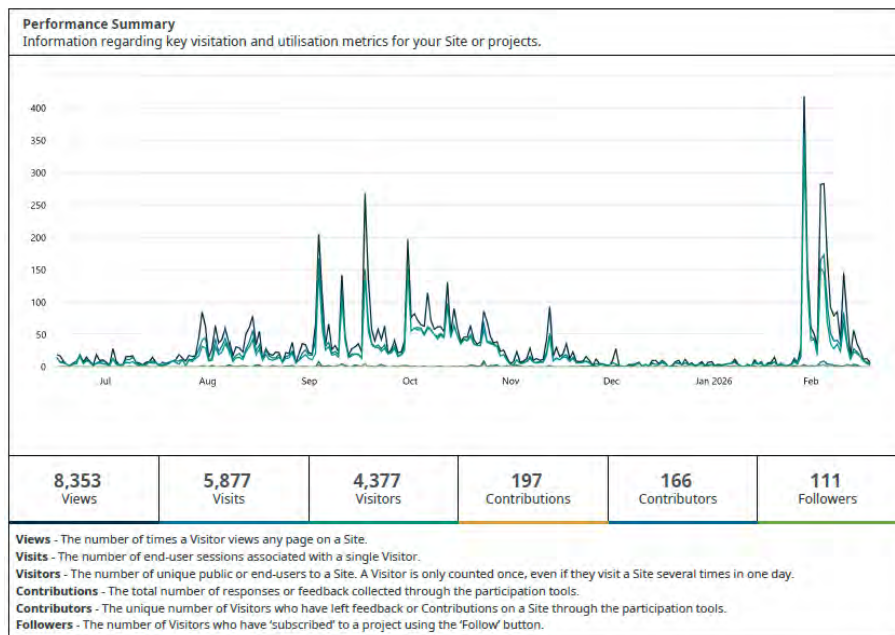
During the engagement period, we heard from a diverse range of people in the Merri-bek

2

community. Overwhelmingly, we heard from people who love and own a dog.

Across all methods of engagement, the community told us that Merri-bek's open spaces are important to them for things like health and wellbeing, community connection and cultural gatherings. They told us that often, the sharing of spaces with different users is done in a respectful way.

Signage was erected in all eight parks at the commencement of the 6-month Pilot outlining the proposed changes with links to the Conversations Merri-bek website. The website received steady interest throughout the pilot with the exception of the summer holiday period. There was a significant spike in activity focused around the final community engagement pop-ups in each of the parks.



At the same time, concerns were raised about:

- Lack of clarity about when and where dogs are allowed in shared spaces
- Concern about the wording of Council's online surveys
- Absence of education and enforcement due to absence of animal management officers
- Conflict between dogs
- Irresponsible dog owners (mostly feedback from and about other dog owners)
- Prevalence of dog poo and a lack of bins as well as dog poo bag dispensers
- Lack of investment in amenities for dogs and dog walkers
- Conflict between dogs and cyclists
- Off-leash dogs disrupting sporting events or users
- Wildlife disturbance in natural areas
- Community members suggested clearer signage about sports schedules and better enforcement to support shared use.
- Need for additional mapping online, through targeted registration mail outs and in parks clearly showing on and off lead areas.

There were some general concerns about the changes being perceived as restrictions on dog owners, despite Stage 1 being framed as a learning opportunity through the pilot sites. In addition, stage 1 included new dog off leash areas and investment in amenities and spaces for dogs and dog owners.

Tate Reserve in Coburg remains challenging with an independently facilitated workshop planned with stakeholders to try and reconcile the community divide. Some minor changes have been suggested to Gilpin Park relating to the enclosed dog park.

Responsible dog ownership and the lack of education and enforcement were two of the main discussion points throughout the engagement program and through all forms of participation. Participants spoke of the need for people to better understand what it means to have a dog under effective control, and to pick up after their dog. There was also a strong desire to understand how the new principles and interventions would be enforced, and concerns around the current lack of enforcement and clear information.

The community told us that sharing spaces with sporting clubs is often difficult because of a lack of awareness of the times and days that sporting clubs are using our reserves, and that onsite signage with a schedule would help dog owners know when they can use our reserves.

There remain ongoing concerns about conflict between dogs and cyclists especially in popular parks with shared paths such as Fleming Park, Gilpin Park, Clifton Park, Gavin Park, Tate Reserve, and Egan Reserve.

There is some concern in the community about the perception of restricting the access and behaviour of dog owners and their dogs through Council's plan to improve the sharing of our parks and reserves through this pilot program. A lot of angst and some miscommunication arose from social media groups misrepresenting changes and spreading disinformation.

Overall, most participants remained positive towards the new principles and to most of the proposed interventions. The interventions that participants were less positive about included new on-lead zones.

The community engagement also resulted in rich feedback from the community on other 240 parks in Merri-bek. This includes parks not earmarked as pilot sites for the first stage but related to dog walking issues and opportunities. Feedback related to the pilot sites has resulted in recommended endorsement of the trial changes for all 7 parks with further proposed recommendations for other parks to be reviewed and presented back to Council as part of Stage 2 together with the Tate Reserve pilot.

Who we heard from

A mixed-method approach was developed to offer a range of opportunities for people to engage in a way that was meaningful to them, at a place and time that was convenient.

Throughout the engagement, we heard from 1,182 people across a range of engagement methods.

The project team received more than 200 submissions from community members and groups by email.

In person engagement

A central element of the Pilot engagement was spending time in the eight pilot parks and talking with park users at different times of the day and week. In addition to providing an opportunity to explain the principles and Pilot interventions to park visitors, this face to face interaction provided a valuable opportunity to ask park visitors about their experience of the Pilot interventions in the eight parks.

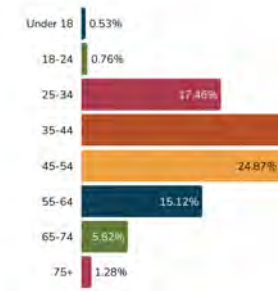
On-line engagement

Through the online survey, participants were able to reflect on their experience of the Pilot interventions in the eight parks: [Dog walking in Merri-bek | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

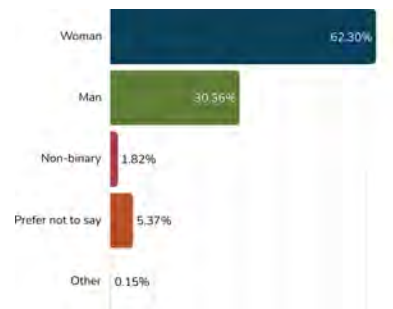
Pop-up engagements

The project team hosted 8 pop-up sessions speaking with over 146 people across the eight Pilot Parks in February 2026. The pop-up sessions were held at different times of day and on different days of the week to maximise the opportunity for people to participate. Any community members were free to attend and had the opportunity to speak with the project team as well as Local Laws Animal Officers, to learn more about the project or raise any concerns.

Age groups



Gender



Engagement themes

The key themes that emerged through the engagement program are detailed below.

Theme	Details
Responsible dog ownership	People need to be more responsible in picking up poo, keeping on lead when they should, being attentive to what their dog is doing, under effective control, current compliance issues, more education for dog owners.
Importance of dog walking on wellbeing	Opportunities for social interactions for dog walkers, building a sense of community, and having access to open space and exercise.
Great environment for dogs	Need for enrichment opportunities for dogs, great dog infrastructure such as dog poo bags.
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance	Need dog poo bags, planting buffers, bins, enrichment for dogs. Includes need for more maintenance and comments around dust bowls or muddy grounds.
Restrictive Local Laws	Disagreement or unhappiness with the current local laws around dogs needing to be on-lead in certain parks/reserves, around playgrounds and SUPs. Support for creek access for dogs.
Need for clear rules & signage	Clarity around what the restrictions are at any given park/reserve and desire for improved signage

Enforcement	How will the new principles and interventions be enforced? Current lack of enforcement.
Habitat protection/biodiversity	Greater measures to stop dogs from damaging plants, waterways and habitats. Includes cats being a bigger issue than dogs.
Support for off-leash	General support for off-leash, support for off-leash in specific parks and reserves, support for timed off-leash
Support for on-leash	General support for areas to be made on-leash.
Support for fencing	General support for fencing/plant buffer areas to separate dogs from habitat/playgrounds/BBQ areas/others not wanting to be around off leash dogs. Includes requests for gates.
Opposes fencing	Oppose the concept of fencing in open space especially fenced dog parks as they are considered dangerous/crowded/promote bad behaviour, negative impact on wildlife
Shared path restrictions unreasonable	Not supportive of shared path restrictions or think they are unrealistic.
Accessibility for all users	Everyone should have equal access to our parks, support for making our open spaces more accessible to all.
Off-leash impacts safety	Having dogs off-leash has a negative impact on the safety of children/other dogs/people. Some people feel uncomfortable around dogs, mentions of being rushed or attacked by dogs.
Off-leash dogs and cyclists	Having dogs off-leash has a negative impact on the safety and experience of cyclists.
Cyclists not observing rules	Cyclists travelling too fast, not alerting people to their presence, not being respectful. Cyclists negatively impacting dirt paths. Can also refer to use of motorbikes/electric bikes.
Concern around principles	Principles are too restrictive for dogs/dog owners, not fair for dogs/dog owners, inconvenient for people to put their dogs on- and off-leash as they walk through or around parks.
Concern around interventions	Don't agree with any changes, want parks and reserves to remain unchanged, don't support timed access, concerned the pilot would introduce lighting along areas of the creek which would negatively impact wildlife, oppose the idea of introducing any more rules in general.
Support principles	General support for principles
Support interventions	General support for interventions, support for timed access, support lighting for safety

Shared spaces with sport - / +	Positive and negative comments - Dogs impacting sports being played and use of space for dogs when sport not in progress, need for public facing platform where community can see what time ovals are being used by sports clubs for games and training. This includes organised and casual sports.
General amenity and vibe	Comments about general use e.g., passive recreation and feel of space.
Different dog owners/dogs have different needs	Recognising we need to provide different options for the differing needs of dogs and their owners, better communication needed between groups who want to use the same space for different reasons, e.g. sports and off lead dogs.
Clear reporting method	Provision and promotion of a clear method for community members to report irresponsible behaviour from dogs/dog owners, cyclists
Feeling safe	Safety is important for everyone, safety for off-leash dog areas, need to more lighting across Merri-bek for improved safety especially for women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community.
Respect for others	People need to treat others with respect
Other	For items outside of scope of the project/outside of Merri-bek or related to nothing in particular. Includes feedback on survey layout and design.

Location-based comments

We received 1,036 comments related to specific locations. They are themed below ranked most common to least common for 7 of the 8 pilot parks with Tate Reserve feedback deferred until a later Council Report.

Gilpin Park, Brunswick

Theme
Great environment for dogs
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance especially mowing
Responsible dog ownership
Support interventions and reduce dogs in playground and not under effective control
Resolve the fenced dog park due to dust and mud bowl issues
Concern around interventions especially any changes to the character of the park
Concern around interventions especially on lead trial on east side of the park.
Maintain fenced dog park options especially for older frail dogs
Support for fencing on Pearson Street
General amenity and vibe

Support for unlimited off-leash areas
Prioritise implementation of endorsed Brunswick Central Parklands Plan
Service dog poo bag dispensers
Different dog owners have different needs
Habitat protection/biodiversity
Accessibility for all users
Importance of dog walking for wellbeing
Off-leash impacts safety
Respect for others
Retain amphitheater space in east of park for dog off leash use
Enforcement and education missing
Provide more seating in the park
Feeling safe
Need for clear rules and signage
Changes are confusing and restrictive for dogs
Support for interventions
Cyclists not observing rules and dangerously moving through park
Off-leash dogs and cyclist conflict
Improve lighting in the park for safety and winter use
Reduce lighting impacts on wildlife
Do not support fencing
More activities and education for non-dog owners
Provide amenities like dog washdown spaces
Provide welcoming comfort stations for dogs outside the playground

Wylie Reserve, Brunswick West

Theme
Great environment for dogs
Accessibility for all users
Lighting will be very welcome
Responsible dog ownership
Shared spaces with sports +
Shared spaces with sports -
Display booking times and days
Increasing booking and use of space by organized sport requires improved communication and notification of when and how long
Concerns were raised about the dog obedience classes held every second Sunday morning, with feedback that they occupy the entire field and can feel unwelcoming to other park users.

More bins and more frequent emptying of waste bins
Some additional seating in the park would be beneficial
Importance of dog walking on wellbeing
Users would like a barbecue installed within or closer to the playground area, along with additional seating and tables nearby to better support family use.
Feeling safe
General amenity and vibe
Different dog owners have different needs
Concern around interventions

Fleming Park, Brunswick East

Theme
Shared spaces with sport – improved communication from sporting clubs
Great environment for dogs
Responsible dog ownership
Importance of dog walking for wellbeing
Support for winter lighting
Support for fencing
Concern around congestion and size of Cross St dog off leash area when sport occurring
Need for more seating and picnic tables on Cross St side as well as in dog on lead area
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance
Require irrigation upgrades especially in dog off leash areas
Different dog owners have different needs
Enforcement
Concerns about uneven sporting surface and risks from many holes created by dogs
Support for off-leash area
Concern around interventions
More shade and shelter from elements
General amenity and vibe
Need for clear rules and signage
Request for prior notification when sportsfield works or herbicide spraying is to occur
Respect for others
Feeling safe
Accessibility for all users
Support for interventions
Off-leash impacts safety
Off-leash dogs and cyclists

Not supportive of on-leash
Habitat protection/biodiversity
Restrictive for dogs
Shared path restrictions unreasonable

Harmony Park, Coburg

Theme
Support for off-leash
Support for fencing
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance
Water required
Ensure school and other non-dog owners can still utilize the space
Accessibility for all users
Need for irrigation as space is not useable during summer with lots of weeds and thistles
Concerns around visual impact of interventions
General amenity and vibe
Habitat protection/biodiversity
More shade and shelter required
Responsible dog ownership
Support for interventions
Supports interventions

Robinson Reserve, Coburg

Theme
Support for off-leash
Adjust timed use from 5pm commencement to 4pm until 9am to support social use of the park.
Great environment for dogs
Off-lead area has fostered stronger community connections.
Support for fencing
Support for interventions
Need to target repeat dog owners who do not pick up after their dogs
Add some more picnic tables for social gatherings
Improve park lighting to improve cooler month usage and safety
Different dog owners have different needs
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance
Concern around interventions and impact on community garden
Importance of dog walking on wellbeing

General amenity and vibe
Strong social networks formed as a result of the changes
Enforcement
Feeling safe
Responsible dog ownership
Need for clear rule and signage
Not supportive of off-leash
Off-leash impacts safety for more vulnerable park users

Lorne Street Reserve, Fawkner

Theme
Great environment for dogs
Strong social connections formed since fencing installed
Strong support for off-leash fenced area
More/improved dog infrastructure/maintenance: water, seating, platform seats, shelter
More shade tree and habitat planting
Request for social and recreation investments based on endorsed Parkland Plan
Responsible dog ownership
Habitat protection/biodiversity
Consider lighting and safety improvements especially during winter

GE Clarke Reserve, Glenroy

Theme
Strong support for off-leash
Appreciate concrete path and fencing barrier to playground
Need for more seating
Suggestion of a circuit gravel path would increase use and functionality of the space
General positive amenity and vibe
Consider another bin at northern end of path
Great environment for dogs
Responsible dog ownership
Supports interventions

Tate Reserve, Coburg

Pilot on hold until resolution of stakeholder conflict. General community support for fenced habitat area east of central gravel path but vandalism and anti-fence community members
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Dog Walking in Merri-bek

Stage 1 Pilot Recommendations





Dog Walking in Merri-bek – *Stage 1 Pilot Recommendations*

Front image: Gilpin Park, Brunswick

Image above: Gilpin Park, Brunswick

Prepared by:

Open Space Design & Development Unit

Merri-bek City Council

April 2026

Dog Walking in Merri-bek Pilot Sites for Stage 1

1. Gilpin Park	Albert St	Brunswick
2. Fleming Park	Albert St	Brunswick East
3. Harmony Park	Gaffney St	Coburg
4. Robinson Reserve	McPherson St	Coburg
5. Tate Reserve	Grant St	Coburg
6. Lorne Street Reserve	Lorne St	Fawkner
7. Wylie Reserve	Union St	Brunswick West
8. GE Clarke Reserve	Kalang Rd	Glenroy



Image: Lorne Street Reserve, Fawkner

Introduction

This attachment accompanies the April 2026 Council Report on the Dog Walking in Merri-bek Project and presents the recommendations from the Stage 1 pilot parks. The maps outline the recommended on-leash and off-leash zones. The zoning areas were trailed through a six-month period from August 2025 to February 2026. These proposals aim to balance dog walking access with environmental protection and safe shared use of public open space.

The community feedback received during the six-month pilot of Stage 1 in the 8 parks has informed the recommended permanent changes and potential future interventions to other parks across Merri-bek during Stage 2.

During the Stage 1 pilot Council undertook additional monitoring and evaluation, including:

- Monitored community usage of the changes in the parks
- Evaluated the environmental impacts of the new dog off leash, no dog and timed use areas
- Recorded any incidents in the pilot parks
- Used AI trained thermal heat cameras to map park usage, duration of stay, hot spots in the park and types of users in some parks
- Engaged student researchers to develop a dogs and the environment evaluation framework to collect baseline data to understand the impact of no dog, dogs on leash and dog off leash zones. This framework was unable to be implemented due to high levels of community opposition to the amended zoning of Tate Reserve. Due to remaining community division, Tate Reserve is excluded from the recommendations in the Council Report with planned independently facilitated workshops to attempt to resolve the community division.
- Meetings with the community and key stakeholders to understand how their experience of the pilot interventions
- Eight follow up pop-up engagements at the conclusion of the 6-month pilot in February 2026.



Image: Fleming Park, Brunswick East

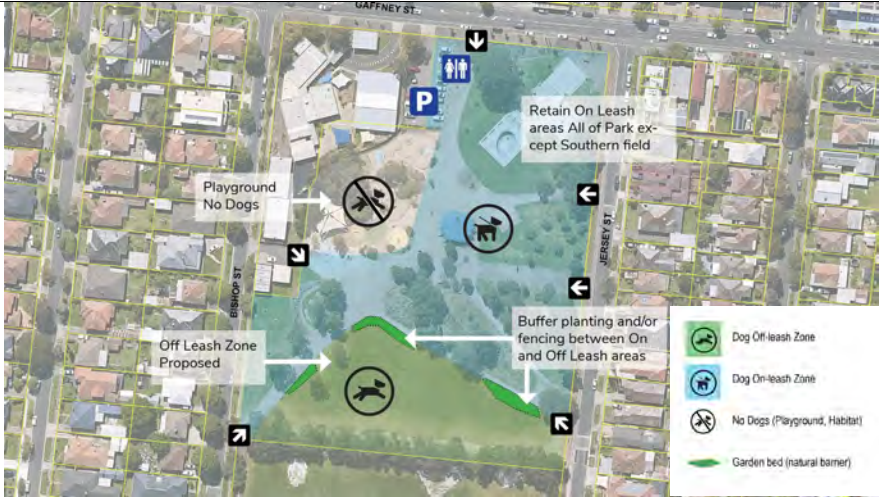
1. Gilpin Park - Albert St, Brunswick

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p>
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create dog on-leash zone in the east to incorporate playground, shared path, nature play area and passive recreation areas • Temporary signage at entry points and at fenced dog park entries • Install permanent fencing along Pearson Street to improve safety and activation of the western side of the park • Installation of new waste bins • Installation of new drinking fountain on Pearson Street • Create new pilot fenced small dog area in western area of mulch under the Sugar Gums next to Pearson Street, separating it from the larger dog park. • Undertaking improvements to the existing fenced dog park through engagement with park users, including, for example, improved surface treatments, amenities, drainage improvements, lighting and additional shade and habitat plantings.
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New enclosed dog park on Pearson Street • Renewal of existing fenced dog park • Dog on lead restrictions around shared path and playground • No expansion of enclosed dog parks • Retention of open bushland and delivery of elements identified in Brunswick Central Parkland and IWM Plan <p>Concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog on lead zoning in eastern end of park to create picnic area and buffer to shared path and playground • Conflict between dogs and cyclists • Noise from fenced dog park <p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot. Creation of a dog on lead required to provide social and passive recreation space.</p>

2. Fleming Park - Albert St, Brunswick East

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p>	
<p>Pilot changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created dog on leash zones to incorporate playground, shared path, passive recreation zones • Dog off-leash zone on the oval (when no sports) and in southern part of the park • Improved fencing around the oval to better contain dogs at vulnerable sections like at the playground and shared path • Improved temporary signage at entry points and at the oval. • Installed new fencing along Cross Street, supporting safe dog off leash walking in the southwest section of the park. • Installation of new waste bins • Lighting upgrades to provide early evening lighting for dog walking during cooler months 	
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for all changes and improved legibility and sharing of open space. Concerns remained about the lack of information about scheduled sporting use and conflict between dogs and cyclists. There was some concern about uneven park irrigation especially on Cross Street side.</p> <p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot and investigate expansion of park irrigation. Creation of a dog on lead required to provide social and passive recreation space.</p>	

3. Harmony Park - Gaffney St, Coburg


<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p> 
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a dog off leash zone in the southern section of the park • Installed garden beds and fencing to improve legibility and separation between zones • Installed section of fencing along Jersey Street to improve safety of dog off leash area • Temporary signage at entry points • Installation of new waste bins
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New off leash area • Partial fencing <p>Concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing space with adjoining primary school and other park users • Responsible dog ownership • Lack of water and amenities • Condition of the grass during summer without irrigation <p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot with improved amenities and further investigation of park irrigation.</p>

4. Robinson Reserve – McPherson St, Coburg

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p>	
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a timed dog off leash zone in the northern section of the park (access for off leash restricted before 9am and after 5pm, access for on leash at all times) • Installed fencing and garden bed improving legibility and separation between zones • Install temporary signage at entry points 	
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New off leash area • Timed access • Partial fencing <p>Concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing space with community garden • Lack of lighting during cooler months after 5pm <p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot with improved amenities and investigation of timed lighting upgrades.</p>	

5. Tate Reserve - Grant St, Coburg – Deferred


6. Lorne Street Reserve - Lorne St, Fawkner

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p> 
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a pilot fenced dog off leash park in the northern area, at Lorne Street entrance. • Installation of new waste bins • Install temporary signage at entry points
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New fenced dog park <p>Concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of amenities such as water, seating • Prioritisation of dog off leash investments relative to proposed social and recreational investments in Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan
<p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot with improved amenities.</p>

7. Wylie Reserve - Union St, Brunswick West

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p> 
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access through improved lighting during cooler months • Installation of new waste bins • Installed temporary signage at entry points
<p>Community Response</p> <p>General support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting <p>Concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict with organised sports • Lack of information about scheduled sporting use
<p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot.</p>

8. GE Clarke Reserve – Kalang Rd, Glenroy

<p>Stage 1 Pilot Changes</p> 
<p>Pilot Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated as dog off-leash area (zoned) • New accessible path access to the park • Installed a garden bed as a natural barrier between off-leash area and playground • Installation of new bins • Installed temporary signage at entry points
<p>Community Response</p>
<p>General support for changes.</p>
<p>Recommendation: retention of all elements of pilot. Installation of seating.</p>

7.2 SHARED E-BIKE SCHEME FOR MERRI-BEK

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade

City Design and Economy

Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Approves a pause on progressing a shared e-bike scheme.
2. Receives a future report when a Merri-bek shared e-bike scheme becomes feasible.

REPORT

Executive summary

Shared mobility programs across Melbourne have expanded rapidly since their introduction in 2020, with strong uptake alongside ongoing challenges related to parking, safety, and integration across municipal boundaries. Following a Victorian Government trial, councils are now progressing shared mobility services independently, with varying delivery models and timelines.

Merri-bek resolved to proceed with a shared e-bike scheme in collaboration with several other councils. A further Council resolution in August 2025 revised the Merri-bek shared e-bike framework to move to fully on-street parking and operator-funded infrastructure. While this approach responds to community concerns regarding footpath access and safety, it also has implications for commercial feasibility, delivery complexity, and operator interest.

At the same time, neighbouring councils are progressing shared e-bike schemes independently. The absence of a coordinated multi-council approach creates uncertainty around cross-boundary compatibility and reduces the benefits of an integrated network.

In this context, proceeding to procurement at this stage would expose Council to elevated delivery, financial, and reputational risk. A pause is therefore recommended to allow neighbouring Councils' schemes to mature, provide clearer evidence on operational models and market conditions, and enable Merri-bek to determine a more viable and aligned approach to bringing shared e-bike services to the municipality.

Previous Council decisions

Shared E-Bike Scheme for Merri-bek (Update) – 13 August 2025

That Council:

1. *Notes the results of community engagement related to a shared e-bike scheme, including that the biggest issue of concern was about footpath access.*
2. *Delegates authority to the CEO to finalise and sign a multi-council Memorandum of Understanding for selecting shared e-bike operator(s).*
3. *Notes that virtual parking pins have a low accuracy and should not be considered for Merri-bek, except for temporary or short-term parking uses. All shared e-bike parking bays to be installed on the road and none on footpaths.*
4. *Receives a report for a decision to allow a shared scheme in Merri-bek once the outcome of the joint procurement proceedings is known.*
5. *Notes that any agreement with shared e-bike operators be predicated on the private e-bike operator agreeing to fully fund the installation of parking bays.*

Shared E-Bike and E-Scooter Community Engagement Approach – 12 February 2025

That Council:

1. *Notes current trends in shared mobility (e-bikes and e-scooters) and the changing policy landscape in neighbouring local government areas.*
2. *Endorses wider community consultation including options for "other comments" to enable broad observations to be conveyed as well as the parking approach and proposed staged rollout of shared mobility to occur in May 2025 with the following amendments:*
 - a) *A drop-in session to be held in Coburg as well as Brunswick, with flexibility for additional sessions if the weather restricts attendance.*
 - b) *The consultation to extend for 5 weeks and 6 weekends (from 25 April to 1 June).*
 - c) *Should the project progress to stage 2 or 3, that consultation and drop in sessions be held in Glenroy and Fawkner.*
3. *Extends the period for a further report to Council to August 2025 instead of April 2025 for a decision on enabling a shared mobility scheme that considers the feedback obtained during the community consultation and with specific other stakeholder groups.*

Shared Mobility (e-scooters) Update – 12 June 2024

That Council:

1. *Approves in principle Merri-bek's participation in the development of an inter-council shared e-bike and e-scooter procurement process, in order to influence the form of future Agreements, but noting that participation does not tie Merri-bek to signing any Agreement.*
2. *Expresses its strong preference for any further e-scooter scheme in Merri-bek to adopt a designated parking approach, that restricts shared e-bike and e-scooter parking to specific locations and considers options for compliance and enforcement*
3. *Establishes a Stakeholder Reference Group on Shared e-bike and e-scooter made up of suitable representatives from the community including community groups, Council's current reference groups and Advisory Committees to first meet within 3 months and continue until any operator has been in place for 12 months or a Council decision is made not to participate*
4. *Seeks a report to Council in February 2025 seeking endorsement to consult on a draft Framework for shared e-bike and e-scooter in Merri-bek that benefits from Stakeholder Reference Group input as well as inviting expert advice from Vision Australia, formal advocacy groups for aged and disability access and risk experts, to come back for final adoption*
5. *Seeks a report to Council in April 2025 for a decision on enabling a shared e-bike and e-scooter trial, with a designated parking approach that restricts parking to specific locations so that shared e-bike and e-scooter devices do not impact pedestrian accessibility consistent with the intent of the Framework for shared e-bike and e-scooter in Merri-bek.*
6. *Notes that there are both expenditure and revenue implications from pursuing shared e-bike and e-scooter schemes, with required staffing resources expected to be offset through the collection of fees from operators, and*
7. *Refers the initial resource need of \$78,397 to the final 2024/25 Budget.*

1. Policy context

Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy (2024)

The Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy establishes Council's transport vision and objectives across safety, accessibility, sustainability, and inclusion. It identifies shared mobility as a potential component of the transport network, subject to feasibility assessment and appropriate policy settings.

Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2025–2029

The Action Plan includes an action to:

2.6 Deliver and evaluate a shared e-bike program using a designated parking approach.

While this action identifies implementation of a shared e-bike scheme, the 12-month pause recommended in this paper enables Council to ensure that any future delivery is feasible, aligned with neighbouring municipalities, and consistent with Council's broader transport objectives.

Streets for People Plan (2025)

The Streets for People Plan prioritises corridors that support walking, cycling, and local amenity. These corridors have informed the identification of potential shared e-bike parking locations, aligning deployment with streets where demand and safety outcomes are expected to be strongest.

Parking Management Policy

The current Parking Management Policy does not explicitly address shared mobility parking. A future scheme would require amendments to enable efficient delivery of on-street parking bays at scale.

Zero Carbon Merri-bek

Shared e-bikes support the transition to low-emissions transport and have demonstrated potential to replace private vehicle trips in urban areas.

Council Plan 2025–2029

Shared mobility supports Council's Beautiful and Liveable City objectives for accessible, healthy, and liveable communities by improving transport options, supporting active travel, and reducing reliance on private vehicles

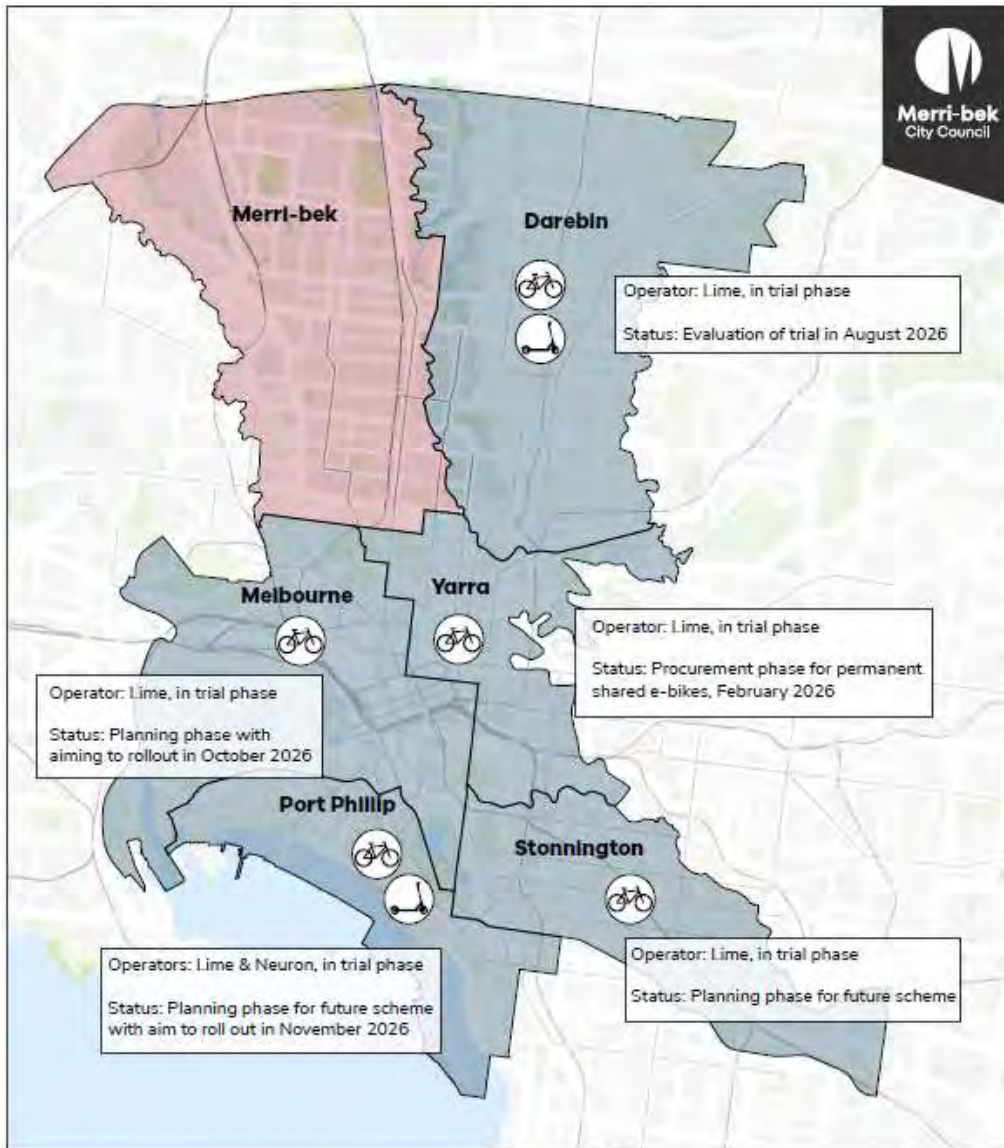
2. Background

At its meeting on 13 August 2025, Council considered a proposed approach to implementing a shared e-bike scheme. The approach was amended to require:

- 100% of shared e-bike parking bays to be located on-street
- All parking infrastructure to be fully funded by operators

This has been actioned with revisions to the parking network identified – all virtual and footpath-based bays removed, and alternative on-street locations confirmed. The impact of these changes on the cost, delivery, and market feasibility has also been considered. It is likely that the revised framework will be more costly and may not attract sufficient market interest in the current context.

At the same time, the anticipated multi-council procurement process did not proceed due to differing timelines and delivery models across municipalities. The approaches that neighbouring councils are progressing are summarised in Figure 1.



Shared Mobility Program Update

Summary of local councils

Legend

- Merri-bek City Council
- Other local councils with existing or planned shared mobility programs



Figure 1: Summary of Shared Mobility Schemes in inner Melbourne municipalities – as at March 2026

Neighbouring councils are progressing shared mobility programs as follows:

- **City of Melbourne** – extending its existing scheme and progressing a phased rollout with a mix of on-road and limited footpath parking.
- **City of Yarra** – progressing procurement for a permanent scheme.
- **City of Darebin** – undertaking a trial with on-road, footpath, and virtual parking.
- **City of Port Phillip and City of Stonnington** – progressing a joint procurement with a different delivery model.

3. Issues

Proceeding at this stage would expose Council to elevated delivery, financial, and reputational risk. There are four main risks:

- Procurement and cross-boundary integration. The lack of alignment between neighbouring council schemes increases the risk that a Merri-bek scheme may not integrate effectively across municipal boundaries. This would reduce usability and limit network benefits.
- Financial viability and market interest. Merri-bek's requirement for operators to fully fund on-street infrastructure represents a significant capital investment and shifts all commercial risk to operators. Initial market testing indicates this is likely to reduce operator interest and competition, increasing the risk of an unsuccessful or suboptimal procurement outcome.
- Delivery complexity and timing. An entirely on-street parking model requires detailed traffic assessments, approvals, and construction for each site. This increases delivery timeframes and administrative complexity, and cost may impact on scheme feasibility.
- It is expected that a reasonable number of on-street car parks will be impacted thus reducing available on-street parking in the trial area. Whilst the actual number of parking spaces will need to be identified as part of detailed traffic assessment, officers estimate that up to 150 on-street car parks could be impacted, which may require public consultation.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Council established a Shared Mobility Stakeholder Panel comprising representatives from community groups, trader associations, and advisory committees, including disability and age-friendly advocates.

Engagement undertaken in November 2025 provided updates on revised parking locations and timelines. Feedback from panel members indicated strong support for the shift to on-street parking and the prioritisation approach.

Should a shared e-bike scheme proceed in the future, the Panel will continue to provide input during implementation and early operations.

5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and resources implications

A future shared e-bike scheme would include a fee structure for operators. Over time, it is anticipated that revenue would offset operational and staffing costs. The financial implications of implementation will be further explored as part of a future report.

7. Implementation

Subject to Council's decision, officers will pause further work on procuring a shared e-bike operator for the time being. We will continue to:

- Monitor neighbouring council schemes and market developments
- Assess emerging evidence on pricing, compliance, parking models, and operations
- Refine internal policy, governance, and operational approaches
- Undertake targeted stakeholder engagement as required

A further report will be provided to Council should conditions become more conducive for a shared e-bike Scheme in Merri-bek.

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.3 PROPOSED AMENDMENT C239MBEK – BRUNSWICK AND COBURG ACTIVITY CENTRES HERITAGE PROJECT: DECISION GATEWAY 1

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade
City Design and Economy

Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centre Heritage Study: Stage 2 Final Report* (GML Heritage, 2025) at Attachment 1 as the general basis for Amendment C239mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme (Amendment).
2. Notes the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study Peer Review* (Lovell Chen, 2025) at Attachment 2 and the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centre Heritage Project: Summary of findings and officer recommendations* report at Attachment 3.
3. As the planning authority, applies to the Minister for Planning (Minister) under section 8A of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic) (Act), for authorisation to prepare the Amendment.
4. If authorisation is received:
 - a) Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make changes to the draft Amendment documentation at Attachment 5 as required prior to exhibition of the Amendment to correct any administrative errors and to meet any conditions the Minister imposes through authorisation.
 - b) Endorses, for the purpose of exhibition, the draft Amendment documentation at Attachment 5, subject to any changes required under (4)(a) above.
 - c) Exhibits the Amendment in accordance with sections 17, 18 and 19 of the Act.

REPORT

Executive summary

The Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres contain a mix of commercial shopfronts, civic and community buildings, former industrial buildings, and residential development ranging from the nineteenth century to the present day. As key Activity Centres, both centres have seen (and will continue to see), significant change and development.

Following two Council resolutions, Council engaged independent consultants, GML Heritage, in 2024 to provide technical heritage expertise for the project. The work was delivered in two stages:

- **Stage 1:** Preliminary heritage assessment of all properties within the activity centre boundaries. Stage 1 is not addressed in this report.
- **Stage 2:** Detailed heritage investigation and recommendations for places identified in Stage 1.

Council received GML Heritage's final report, *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centre Heritage Study – Stage 2 Final Report* (Stage 2 Report), in June 2025. The Stage 2 Report is provided at **Attachment 1**. An independent peer review was completed in October 2025 by Lovell Chen Heritage Consultants (see **Attachment 2**).

Based on this work, officers recommend that Council adopt the Stage 2 Report as the strategic basis for Amendment C239mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and seek authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare and exhibit the Amendment.

The proposed Amendment will ensure the Heritage Overlay is current and accurate, including the identification of places of heritage significance in areas undergoing change. Specifically, the Amendment will:

- Apply the Heritage Overlay to six individually significant places.
- Apply the Heritage Overlay to one new heritage precinct.
- Amend four existing Heritage Overlay precincts.
- Correct mapping errors affecting HO170 and HO600.

*The Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Project: Summary of findings and officer recommendations report is at **Attachment 3**.*

Previous Council decisions

Heritage Shopfronts in Coburg - 12 July 2023

That Council:

1. *Includes an action in the Heritage Implementation Plan 2022-2025 to undertake a preliminary heritage assessment of properties within the Coburg Activity Centre (from Bell Street to Moreland Road), subject to funding allocation of \$60,000.*
2. *Considers funding allocation of \$60,000 in 2023/24 as part of the quarter 1 budget review.*
3. *Makes the following additional changes to the Heritage Implementation Plan 2022-2025:*
 - a) *Item P5: Prepare a Conservation Management Plan for CERES Community Environment Park and Joe's Market Garden to support implementation of the findings of the Merri-bek Heritage Nominations Study - move to 2025/2026.*
 - b) *Item P6: Undertake a preliminary assessment to understand extent of Victorian cottages in Brunswick that are within a Heritage Overlay, and those that are not - move to 2025/2026.*

Vibrant Brunswick – 10 May 2023

That Council:

1. *Notes the feedback from the community in Phases 1 and 2 of community engagement as outlined in the Vibrant Brunswick Final Engagement Report at Attachment 1.*
2. *Endorses the revised Draft Brunswick Activity Centre Zone at Attachment 2 and Draft Vibrant Brunswick Structure Plan at Attachment 3 for Phase 3 of community engagement.*
3. *Resolves that subject to funding allocation, to commence a comprehensive review of built form controls in the Brunswick Activity Centre across the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.*

...

Community Heritage Action Plan – 7 December 2022

That Council:

1. *Note the Heritage Action Plan 2017 – 2032 Implementation Plan for the 2022-2025 period as shown at Attachment 1.*
2. *Include an additional action in the Implementation Plan 2022-2025, to research and document the history of the Upfield Rail Line, with an anticipated budget requirement of \$20,000.*
3. *Develop a Terms of Reference for and establish a Heritage and Local History Reference Group chaired by Cr Tapinos, which meets quarterly and includes representatives from local historical societies.*

4. *Refer unfunded items in the Heritage Action Plan 2017 – 2032 Implementation Plan 2022-2025 to the 2023/2024 budget process for consideration.*

1. Policy Context

Council Plan

The *Merri-bek City Council Plan 2025–2029* identifies “Beautiful and liveable city” as a key strategic objective. Protecting and managing places of heritage significance through the planning scheme supports this objective by maintaining the valued character, identity, and sense of place within Merri-bek’s activity centres as they evolve and grow.

Heritage Action Plan

The *Merri-bek Heritage Action Plan 2017-2032* guides Council in meeting its heritage obligations outlined in legislation, including the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. The Plan seeks to protect Merri-bek’s heritage places from inappropriate demolition, development or subdivision by identifying and protecting heritage places through the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. The following actions are relevant to Amendment C239mbek:

- K15 - Prepare heritage reports as required to assist with the assessment of planning applications or planning scheme amendments where there is no current heritage control.
- P8 - Continue to review new and emerging heritage in Moreland [Merri-bek] as it develops.

Planning and Environment Act 1987

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* outlines the objectives of planning in Victoria. Councils have a duty under section 4(1) to implement these objectives. Specific to heritage, these include objectives to:

- Provide for the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use, and development of land.
- Conserve and enhance those buildings, areas or other places which are of scientific, aesthetic, architectural or historical interest, or otherwise of special cultural value.

Council therefore has an obligation to manage its local heritage and subsequently is required to undertake the relevant research to identify properties which hold local significance.

Merri-bek Planning Scheme Planning

The Merri-bek Planning Scheme provides the statutory framework for managing development affecting places of heritage significance.

State policy at Clause 15.03-1S (Heritage Conservation) seeks to conserve places of heritage significance and ensure development respects identified heritage values and the setting of heritage places.

Local policy at Clause 15.03-1L (Heritage in Merri-bek) provides more detailed guidance for development affecting heritage places. This includes respecting the scale, form, massing and siting of heritage buildings and ensuring alterations and additions are visually recessive.

Heritage Overlay

The Heritage Overlay (HO) is a planning control in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme that applies to places and precincts identified as having heritage significance. Where the overlay applies, a planning permit may be required for subdivision, demolition, external alterations, additions or new development. This ensures that changes respect the heritage significance, character and setting of the place.

2. Background

Following two Council resolutions in 2023, the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Project (Project) was initiated to review existing and potential heritage places and precincts within the two evolving centres.

These vibrant centres are anchored by the Upfield rail corridor and the Sydney Road commercial spine. Their heritage reflects the historic evolution of the Sydney Road corridor as a major transport and commercial route serving Melbourne's northern suburbs. This is expressed in the fine-grain pattern of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century shopfronts along Sydney Road, complemented by civic buildings, former industrial sites and surrounding Victorian, Edwardian and interwar residential areas.

Currently across Victoria, there is a strong policy focus on facilitating housing supply. Both Brunswick and Coburg have been identified by the Victorian Government in the Activity Centres Program (Program), which seeks to support increased housing in locations that are well serviced by jobs, services and public transport.

Progressing a heritage review within this context of competing planning priorities requires clear strategic justification and robust supporting evidence.

Supporting technical heritage advice

Council engaged independent heritage consultants, GML Heritage, in early 2024 to undertake a review of places within the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres. GML Heritage progressed this work in two stages:

- **Stage 1:** Preliminary heritage assessment of all properties within the activity centre boundaries. Stage 1 is not addressed in this report.
- **Stage 2:** Detailed heritage investigation and recommendations for places identified in Stage 1.

The second stage involved assessing five new precincts and 11 new individual places, as well as two individual places with an existing Heritage Overlay and the Sydney Road Precinct (HO149).

The *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centre Heritage Study, Stage 2 Final Report* (Stage 2 Study) at **Attachment 2** provides the following recommendations:

1. Add three new precincts of local heritage significance to the Heritage Overlay.
2. Add ten new individual places of local heritage significance to the Heritage Overlay.
3. Amending existing Heritage Overlay controls including:
 - HO1 – Albert Street Brunswick Precinct.
 - HO77 – Frederick Street Precinct.
 - HO149 – Sydney Road Brunswick Precinct incorporating: HO61, HO151, HO154, HO155, HO156, HO158, HO160, HO162, HO163, HO167, HO170, and HO248.
 - HO243 – Former Alhambra Theatre.

Peer Review of the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study

Council engaged Lovell Chen Heritage Consultants in mid-2025 to undertake an independent peer review of the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study – Stage 2 Final Report*. This was to ensure the methodology, findings and associated heritage citations are robust, defensible and fit for purpose.

The *Brunswick and Coburg Heritage Peer Review* (Lovell Chen Heritage Consultants, 2025) was completed in October 2025 and is provided at **Attachment 2**.

Importantly, the peer review found that the methodology, significance gradings and research undertaken in the Stage 2 Study are consistent with accepted heritage practice and supported by appropriate comparative analysis, consistent with *Planning Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay* (PPN01).

The review supported the inclusion of one new heritage precinct and six individually significant places in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and recommended updates to several existing Heritage Overlay schedules. While the overall application of the HERCON criteria was considered sound, the review noted that in some cases the threshold for local heritage significance involved professional judgement.

The Stage 2 Report provides the primary technical evidence base for identifying places of potential heritage significance within the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres. The independent Peer Review provides an additional level of scrutiny to confirm the methodology, analysis and recommendations.

3. Issues

Officer assessment

Council officers have reviewed both the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study – Stage 2 Final Report* (GML Heritage, 2025) and the *Brunswick and Coburg Heritage Peer Review* (Lovell Chen, 2025).

The findings of these reports, together with officer commentary and recommendations, are summarised in the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Project: Summary of Findings and Officer Recommendations* report (**Attachment 3**).

In considering both reports, officers have assessed the recommendations and exercised professional judgement to identify an appropriate and balanced outcome for Council's consideration.

In summary, the following final supported findings of the Stage 2 Report are identified:

1. Add one new precinct of local heritage significance to the Heritage Overlay (Linden Street, Brunswick East).
2. Add six new individual places of local heritage significance to the Heritage Overlay.
3. Amend existing Heritage Overlay controls including:
 - HO1 – Albert Street Brunswick Precinct.
 - HO77 – Frederick Street Precinct.
 - HO149 – Sydney Road Brunswick Precinct incorporating: HO61, HO151, HO154, HO155, HO156, HO158, HO160, HO162, HO163, HO167, and HO248.

Officers also support correcting mapping anomalies affecting HO170 and HO600 identified in the Peer Review. These corrections were identified during the officer review process and were not included in the Stage 2 Report. Further detail is provided in **Attachment 3**, Section 4.

State Government Activity Centres Program – Merri-bek Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres

On 18 March 2026, the State Government released the final maps for the Activity Centres Program (Program) for Merri-bek's train and tram zone activity centres. These maps establish core and catchment boundaries, indicative building heights and other built form guidance for the Coburg and Brunswick Activity Centres, forming part of a wider State initiative to plan for more homes close to public transport across Melbourne.

While the Program introduces new built form guidance to inform future development, existing heritage protections are still expected to apply alongside these controls. The Heritage Overlay and other statutory overlays remain relevant, ensuring that heritage considerations continue to be taken into account when assessing planning applications within a Heritage Overlay.

Attachment 4 shows the Activity Centre core boundary, the application of the existing Heritage Overlay, and the proposed Heritage Overlay under Amendment C239mbek.

Officer recommendation – Proposed Amendment C239mbek

Based on this assessment, officers recommend that Council adopt the *Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study – Stage 2 Final Report* at **Attachment 1** as the primary strategic basis for Amendment C239mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

Officers also recommend seeking authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare and exhibit the Amendment, with draft documentation provided at **Attachment 5**.

The Amendment would apply and update the Heritage Overlay for identified places and precincts within the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres to ensure their heritage values are appropriately recognised and managed.

Specifically, the Amendment would implement, in part, the recommendations of the Stage 2 Report by amending the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to:

- Apply the Heritage Overlay to six individually significant places and one new heritage precinct.
- Amend the boundaries and controls of existing heritage precincts.
- Correct mapping anomalies within the Heritage Overlay.
- Amend the Merri-bek Heritage Exemptions Incorporated Plan.
- Update Clause 15.03-1L (Heritage in Merri-bek) to reference the heritage study.
- Amend Clause 43.01 – Heritage Overlay Schedule to include new places and updated controls.

The Amendment supports the objectives of planning in Victoria by conserving and enhancing places of heritage significance, while ensuring that as the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres continue to evolve and accommodate growth, new development responds appropriately to their identified heritage values.

Community impact

The proposed Amendment may affect property owners and occupiers where new or amended Heritage Overlay controls are introduced. The Heritage Overlay does not prevent development but requires certain works to be assessed through the planning permit process to ensure they respond appropriately to the heritage significance of the place. Public exhibition of the Amendment will provide affected landowners and the broader community with an opportunity to review the proposed controls and make submissions.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Council declared a climate emergency in 2018 and is committed to urgent action. While the Amendment primarily relates to heritage planning controls, conserving and reusing existing buildings can contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing demolition waste and embodied carbon. Overall, the Amendment is not expected to have significant direct climate emergency implications.

Economic sustainability implications

The Amendment may have economic implications for some landowners where heritage controls are applied, as certain works may require planning approval. However, the Heritage Overlay does not prevent development and can support the distinctive character and attractiveness of activity centres, which may contribute to local economic activity.

Legal and risk considerations

Planning scheme amendments must follow the statutory process under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, including Ministerial authorisation, public exhibition, and consideration of submissions. The Amendment is supported by a heritage study and independent peer review, providing a robust evidence base for the proposed controls.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with *the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

There are no human rights implications related to the report.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Public consultation will occur through the statutory exhibition process for the Amendment. Subject to the Minister for Planning granting authorisation, it is anticipated that exhibition will occur in mid to late 2026 for a minimum period of four weeks.

In accordance with Section 19 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Act), notice of Amendment C239mbek will be given to:

- Owners and occupiers of affected land.
- Prescribed Ministers and relevant public authorities.
- Municipal councils that may be affected by the Amendment.
- Relevant community organisations, including the Coburg Historical Society.

To comply with other notice requirements in section 19 of the Act and to reach the wider community, the following will be provided throughout the exhibition process:

- Publish notice of the Amendment in the Government Gazette and a newspaper circulating generally in the area.
- Make Amendment documentation available on Council's website, with hard copies available on request.
- Provide updates through Council communication channels, including social media.
- Include notice in relevant Council publications, where available during the exhibition period.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

Budget to resource the exhibition of the Amendment and an independent Planning Panel process will be funded by the Strategic Planning Unit operating budget in 2025/2026. The estimated costs are broken down as follows:

Resources:

If the Amendment is approved and gazetted, the impacts on the Urban Planning Unit are expected to be minimal. While the inclusion of additional properties within the Heritage Overlay through Amendment C239mbek may result in a small increase in planning permit applications, this increase is expected to be modest and can be managed within the existing resources of the Urban Planning Unit. No additional resourcing is anticipated.

7. Implementation

If Council resolves in accordance with the officer recommendation, the next step will be to seek authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare the Amendment, as drafted. Following receipt of Ministerial authorisation, the Amendment will proceed to public exhibition.

The implementation timeline is structured around key decision gateways for Council. Timeframes are indicative only and are subject to Ministerial authorisation timelines and the reporting schedule of Planning Panels Victoria. The timeline assumes exhibition of the Amendment in late 2026.

- Decision Gateway 1: Authorisation and exhibition (current report).
- Decision Gateway 2: Consideration of submissions and request for a Planning Panel (early 2027).
- Decision Gateway 3: Consideration of the Planning Panel report and decision on the Amendment (mid 2027).

Attachment/s

1	Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study - Final Report	D26/118683	Under Separate Cover
2	Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Study - Peer Review	D26/118689	Under Separate Cover
3	Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres Heritage Project - Summary Report	D26/87715	Under Separate Cover
4	Activity Centre Boundary and Heritage Overlay (Existing & Proposed)	D26/132191	Under Separate Cover
5	Proposed C239mbek - Draft Amendment Documentation	D26/119799	Under Separate Cover

7.4 DRAFT CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES STRATEGY 2026-2029

Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy

Early Years and Youth

Officer Recommendation

That Council endorses the draft Children Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 for public exhibition between 9 April 2026 – 27 April 2026.

REPORT

Executive Summary

Children and families are at the heart of Merri-bek. Their voices, ideas and lived experiences help shape a vibrant, caring and connected community. By listening deeply and acting with purpose, Council, our partners and the wider community demonstrate that children and families are valued, celebrated and central to our city's future. The draft Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 (**Attachment 1**) sets out an inspiring shared vision for how agencies, governments, families, and the community will work together to create opportunities, strengthen wellbeing, and support every child and family to thrive in Merri-bek.

It identifies three key priority areas: Health and Wellbeing; Connection and Inclusion; Learning and Thriving. A series of strategic objectives are planned under each of these priority areas that will form the basis of a two-year Implementation Plan, incorporating detailed actions, time frames and resourcing requirements. The strategy will inform Council's existing operations, as well as identified collaboration and partnering opportunities with external organisations and the community to deliver on the key strategies.

The strategy was developed through a process of research and data analysis along with a comprehensive stakeholder and community engagement process. Over 4,000 individual comments and pieces of feedback were collected from approximately 1,400 participants through a wide range of methods. A detailed Implementation Plan that outlines specific actions, timelines and responsibilities is being developed to support the delivery of the strategy.

Previous Council Decisions

Children, Young People and Families Plan, Year 4 Review - 10 September 2025

That Council:

1. *Notes the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025 annual review and implementation of Year 4 actions which concludes the Plan.*

1. Policy Context

The Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029 responds to the Merri-bek Community Vision for 2035: *Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.*

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy aligns with a number of key strategic objectives of the Council Plan, in particular:

- Care for nature and climate resilience
- Healthy and inclusive communities
- Beautiful and liveable city

The strategy also seeks to support the health and wellbeing priorities which are incorporated into the Council Plan:

- Improving mental wellbeing and social connection
- Increasing active living
- Tackling climate change and its impacts on health
- Preventing all forms of violence and discrimination
- Improving food systems
- Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use
- Increasing immunisations

The strategy aligns with a range of International, Federal, State and local Merri-bek policies which focus on children and young people's rights and responsibilities, support early childhood development and frameworks for improving health and wellbeing and increasing the participation of children and young people in decision making. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Nest Model: six connected areas that cover the essential things children and young people need for the best start in life.

2. Background

The draft Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 builds on the work of the previous four-year plan which was Merri-bek's first integrated plan for families and children from birth to adulthood. The priorities in this draft strategy have been developed in response to the feedback received from members of the Merri-bek community, including children, young people, parents and families and service providers who participated in a wider range of engagement activities between August and October 2025.

There is a strong and well-established evidence base about the conditions, environments and interventions that create positive outcomes for children and young people. Research consistently shows that when children do not experience optimal conditions early in life, targeted supports and timely interventions can significantly shift developmental pathways and improve long-term wellbeing. The following key findings have informed the development of the strategy:

- Children and young people's outcomes are shaped by the dynamic interaction of risk and protective factors, with cumulative advantage or disadvantage building over time.
- Collaboration across service providers leads to better outcomes, as coordinated, multidisciplinary efforts are more effective than isolated interventions when responding to the complex needs of families.
- Co-located and integrated service models provide substantial benefits, improving access, reducing service fragmentation, strengthening referral pathways and creating more holistic, family-centred support.
- Risk and protective factors interact in powerful ways, where risk factors can negatively affect development, while protective factors act as buffers that strengthen resilience, support recovery and promote positive adjustment even in challenging circumstances.

The priorities in the draft strategy and their associated objectives have also been informed by key state, national and international policies, strategies and evidence-frameworks, and shaped to align with the Merri-bek Community Vision, Council Plan 2025-2029 and other key Merri-bek strategies.

3. Issues

Key challenges

The engagement process identified the following issues and challenges in Merri-bek:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Access to services, mental health, support for parents/carers, housing affordability, substance use, and safety were major concerns.
- **Places and Spaces:** Cleanliness, safety, inclusive infrastructure, and availability of parks and playgrounds were recurring issues.
- **Traffic and Transportation:** Road safety, congestion, accessibility, and cycling infrastructure were highlighted as areas needing improvement.
- **Inclusion and Connection:** Barriers for migrant and refugee families, discrimination, bullying, and support for women/girls were identified.
- **Financial Hardship:** Cost of living, programs and services costs impacted families' ability to access services and participate in community life – leading to issues of isolation, and deprivation.
- **Education, Employment and Youth Services:** Access to services, employment pathways, school engagement, and resources were areas of concern.

Community impact

The aspirations of the strategy will deliver multiple benefits for children, young people and families, improving access to facilities, services and supporting health, development, learning and wellbeing outcomes.

An Implementation Plan will be developed with a series of actions related to the strategic objectives. These actions will include Council's role, timeframe for completion and resourcing requirements.

Coordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the strategy is an important part of understanding its impact and enables Council to identify further opportunities or actions required in the coming years.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 presents an opportunity to further raise the awareness of children and young people about environmental sustainability and the implications of climate change. Merri-bek's young people and families have been active in raising the issue of climate change and its impact on the environment and the community.

Economic sustainability implications

The strategy has as one of its key aspirations to improve learning opportunities and educational outcomes and key life stage transitions for Merri-bek's children and young people, which will have long term benefits in terms of young people's capability to transition from education to employment and contribute to the City's economic prosperity. Improved mental health screening and supports for new parents has the dual benefit of increased economic participation for women and is correlated with improved overall outcomes for children.

Human rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and aligns with Council's Human Rights Policy.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which forms part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, sets out children's right to: Education; health care; economic opportunity; protection from abuse and neglect; protection from sexual exploitation; and protection from economic exploitation.

In addition we recognise the distinct developmental, relational and emotional needs of infants, the right to a responsive caregiver and early developmentally appropriate interventions.

Gender impact assessment

In line with the *Victorian Gender Equality Act (2021)* a Gender Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to how this strategy may have different impacts or lead to different outcomes for people of different genders. The focus on this assessment process was in relation to the engagement process undertaken to inform the development of the strategy – ensuring that diverse groups and voices were captured.

The strategy and its key actions will not result in negative consequences for any group or individual. The application of a gender lens is crucial in the development of the Implementation Plan to ensure individual actions contribute, where appropriate to Council's wider aspiration of creating gender equity in the Merri-bek community.

4. Community Consultation and Engagement

Between August and October 2025 Council conducted almost 50 engagement activities which reached a broad cross-section of the Merri-bek community. Over 4,000 individual comments and pieces of feedback were collected from approximately 1,400 participants through a wide range of methods including “pop-up” consultations at various locations and events, workshops and briefings, surveys and e-newsletters; social media, arts activities, focus groups and briefings. The full report on the engagement process can be found on the Conversations Merri-bek web page and at **Attachment 2**.

Affected persons rights and interests

The interests of children, young people and families are the primary focus of the strategy. The engagement process utilised a variety of methods including art activities enabling very young children to express their aspirations and a number of “pop up” consultations at community events and outreach activities occurred to ensure we reached members of Merri-bek's diverse community. Following endorsement of the strategy further feedback will be invited from the community and stakeholders.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

Implementation of the strategy will require resourcing and a change in focus for some operational areas within Council. Re-alignment of program operations may result in savings and presents an opportunity for re-investment to ensure services address the current and future needs of community.

7. Implementation

Following endorsement of the draft Children, Young People and Families Strategy, it will be available for public exhibition between 9 April 2026 – 27 April 2026.

Following consideration of feedback received the final strategy will be presented at the June 2026 Council Meeting for adoption.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1 | ↓ Draft Merri-bek Children Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 | D26/127948 |
| 2 | ↓ Children Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 - Engagement Report | D26/124963 |



DRAFT
Children, Young People &
Families Strategy 2026-2029



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DRAFT

Executive Summary

Vision: Merri-bek is a place where all children, young people and families feel safe, and valued and have the opportunities and support they need to learn, thrive and be healthy.		
Strategic Priorities		
Health and wellbeing	Connection and inclusion	Learning and thriving
Strategic Objectives		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play and physical activity 2. Being safe and feeling cared for 3. Access to health services and supports 4. Basic needs met 5. A clean and healthy environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusive and connected communities 2. Meaningful participation and influence 3. Inclusive spaces, services and activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early childhood development and learning 2. Developing skills for life 3. Support through life stage transitions
Principles of how we'll deliver this strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships and collaboration • Equity and inclusion • Infant, child and youth centred • Family focused • Cultural safety 		

Introduction

The **Merri-bek Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029** builds on the previous Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025, which was Council's first integrated plan to support local children and young people from birth to adulthood. This Strategy aims to ensure Merri-bek is a place where every child and young person has the best possible start in life.

Our vision

Merri-bek is a place where all children, young people and families feel safe, and valued and have the opportunities and support they need to learn, thrive and be healthy.

Strategic Priorities

The priorities in this Strategy have been developed in response to the feedback we received from over 1400 members of the Merri-bek community who participated in community engagement activities from August to October 2025.

The priorities have also been informed by key state, national and international policies, strategies and evidence-frameworks, and have been shaped to align with the Merri-bek Community Vision, Council Plan 2025-2029 and other key Merri-bek strategies.

The Strategy has three key themes, reflecting what is most important for children, young people and families in Merri-bek:

- Health and wellbeing
- Connection and inclusion
- Learning and thriving

Guiding Principles

Our Guiding Principles outline the essential considerations that must underpin all Action Areas of the Strategy, including how Council and partners will work together—listening, learning, sharing and holding each other accountable as we strive to deliver better outcomes for all children, young people and families.

Partnerships and collaboration

Children, young people and families have complex and changing needs that cannot be addressed by any single organisation working in isolation. Strong, flexible and responsive partnerships are essential to achieving better outcomes. This Strategy is intended to guide Council and our partners as we work together to develop collaborative responses to the strategic priorities and objectives. It reflects a snapshot in time of the issues and priorities identified by the community and stakeholders as most important. We acknowledge that these priorities will evolve and that our collective responses must adapt accordingly.

We are committed to working collaboratively through both formal and informal partnerships that leverage strengths, share expertise and build capacity across Council and the wider systems that support children, young people and families, including education, health and community services. Central to this commitment is working directly with children, young people and families to understand their experiences, respond to their needs and build on the strengths they bring.

Equity and inclusion

We are committed to taking action to address social and economic disadvantage, exclusion and discrimination, and to working to support all children, young people and families to thrive. We are also committed to providing all children, young people and their families with accessible and inclusive services and support.

We recognise that achieving equitable outcomes for all children, young people and families starts at birth and requires us to focus on understanding and, when necessary, prioritising people who may be at greater risk of disadvantage and discrimination. In alignment with Council's Human Rights Policy 2016-2026 we are committed to responding to the needs of children, young people and families from the following groups:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People with Disability
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual-plus, Transgender and gender diverse, Queer or Questioning, Asexual and Aromantic, and Intersex people (LGBTIQ+)
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities
- People experiencing poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage
- Other priority groups who may be identified in the future

Infant, child and youth centred

The needs and rights of infants, children and young people guide this strategy. Like adults, children and infants have civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Additional rights enshrined for all children in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child include the right to protection from abuse and the right to be cared for.

We recognise that infants and young children are dependent on the availability of consistent and responsive care from specific adults for the adequate development of their basic human capacities. We are committed to listening and responding to children and young people and to resourcing and empowering them to shape decisions on the issues that impact them.

Family focused

We recognise that families and supportive relationships provide the foundations that enable children and young people to thrive. Families provide children with the opportunities and experiences that shape their learning, development and wellbeing. To ensure that children and young people thrive, their parents, carers and families also need to be supported in their own wellbeing.

We are committed to working collaboratively with families to understand and respond to their needs and to support them to create the conditions in which their children can learn, develop, be healthy and thrive.

We understand that infants' development depends on consistent, responsive care from specific adults and that the formation of new families is one of the most significant transitions people experience. We are committed to providing culturally appropriate support to parents and carers from pregnancy through the early years, and to actively supporting the development of strong social networks among families in our community.

We recognise that all parents and carers benefit from support when caring for and raising children, including fathers, non-birthing parents, same sex couples, grandparent carers and kinship carers, and believe that services and programs should be designed to actively include and welcome all who care for children.

Cultural safety

We are committed to creating culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families across all services and settings.

A strong sense of identity and culture is essential for wellbeing, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. Cultural safety goes beyond awareness—it requires positive recognition, celebration of culture, and an environment where people can express their identity without fear of racism or discrimination. This is an important consideration in the way Council engages with and delivers services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

We are committed to working in genuine partnership with Wurundjeri and local Aboriginal community controlled services to ensure our services and supports are culturally safe and self-determination focused.

Prioritisation, resourcing and advocacy

Council recognises that the needs and aspirations of children, young people and families exceed the resources available to local government, and that services, programs and supporting infrastructure cannot all be delivered or expanded at the same time. Transparent and consistent principles will be applied in prioritising, resourcing and advocating for action in regard to key priorities. Prioritisation decisions will be guided by a combination of factors, including:

- current and projected demand across different life stages
- areas of greatest service gap, vulnerability or disadvantage, and evidence of unmet need from service data and community engagement
- the effectiveness, accessibility and sustainability of existing service models and supporting infrastructure
- opportunities to improve outcomes through integration, co-location or shared use
- availability of workforce capacity, land, funding and delivery partnerships

Council will manage expectations by aligning service planning, infrastructure planning, engagement and decision-making with adopted strategies and implementation plans, and by clearly communicating the sequencing and staging of investment over time.

Where identified needs cannot be addressed through Council services, programs or infrastructure alone, advocacy to other levels of government and system partners will be a key mechanism for responding. Council will use evidence from service delivery, community engagement and planning to advocate for funding, access to services, workforce capacity, policy change and system reform that support improved outcomes for children, young people and families in Merri-bek.

Key frameworks

This Strategy will be guided by a holistic and evidence-based approach to children and young people's wellbeing and development. In developing this strategy, we have drawn on several key frameworks that help us to understand and respond to children and young people's needs comprehensively and holistically. Our key frameworks and reference points include:

The Nest Wellbeing Framework

Developed by leading Australian academics through the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), the Nest Model, outlines six connected areas that cover the essentials that children and young people need for the best start in life:

- **Valued Loved & Safe.** Ensuring children feel valued in loving and secure environments.
- **Healthy.** Promoting good physical and mental health.
- **Identity & Culture.** Supporting a strong sense of self and belonging, including cultural identity and values.
- **Material Basics.** Providing access to essential material needs like food, housing, transport and other essentials.
- **Participating.** Engaging children and young people in decision-making processes that affect them.
- **Learning.** Encouraging effective learning and development opportunities from early childhood through to adult life.

The First 1000 Days

The period from conception to a child's second birthday, known as the first 1000 days, is firmly established in national and international health policy as the most critical window for human development. During this period, brain architecture is established at a pace never repeated in later life, the foundations of physical and mental health are laid, and the caregiving relationships that shape a child's social and emotional development are formed.

This framework underpins Council's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service and informs how we approach immunisation, infant nutrition, perinatal mental health and new family support.

Infant Mental Health

Infant mental health refers to the social and emotional development of children from birth to three years of age. It is not a clinical concept but a developmental one: the capacity of very young children to experience, regulate and express emotions is shaped above all by the quality and consistency of their caregiving relationships.

When parents and carers are emotionally, practically and socially supported, infants develop secure attachment, healthy stress regulation and the foundations for lifelong learning and resilience. Conversely, when caregiving relationships are disrupted by perinatal depression or anxiety, family violence, trauma, poverty or isolation, the effects on infant development can be profound and lasting.

This framework informs Council's approach to perinatal mental health, family support, new parent group programming, and our partnerships with specialist services. It also reinforces why supporting parents is not separate from supporting children – it is the same work.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) framework

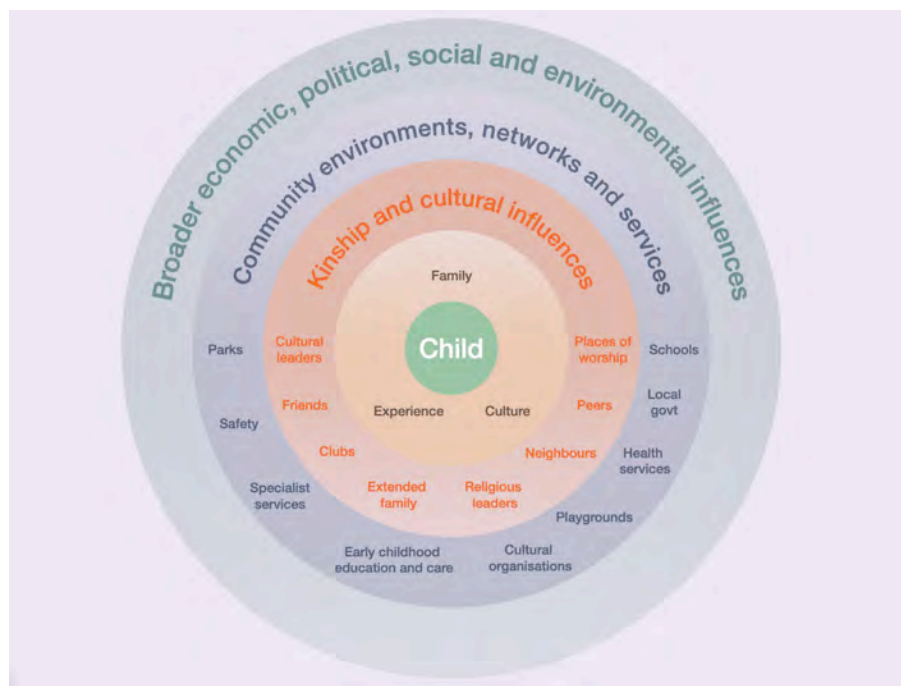
The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service is a free, universal primary health service available to all Victorian families with children from birth to school age which aims to promote and optimise health, wellbeing, safety, development and learning outcomes for all children and their families.

The MCH Framework is underpinned by 10 guiding principles. The first and central principle is: **Child, maternal and family-centred practice**. This principle places the needs and experiences of the child, mother and family at the core of all service delivery. The other nine principles support this principle and promote holistic, responsive and accountable care:

- Universal access
- Victorian Aboriginal communities' cultural safety
- Equitable and inclusive
- Diversity responsiveness
- Health promotion, prevention and early intervention
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Quality and safety
- Evidence informed
- Reflective practice and continuous improvement

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

The VEYLDF outlines a comprehensive approach to children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age, which recognises the crucial connections between wellbeing and learning. The framework is underpinned by an ecological model that acknowledges the influence of family, community, culture, experience and broader economic, political, social and environmental factors on children's wellbeing, learning and development.



Source: Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (Ecological Model adapted from Bronfenbrenner 1979)

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Councils approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is informed by the Social and Emotional (SEWB) framework, which understands wellbeing as holistic and inseparable from connection to Country, culture, family, kinship and community.

The SEWB Framework, developed through the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities and embedded in national Aboriginal health policy, provides a holistic understanding of wellbeing that recognises the individual as embedded in relationships and community — not as an isolated unit.

For children and families, this means that concepts such as attachment, caregiving, family formation and community belonging must be understood within extended kinship structures and cultural frameworks. It also means that culturally safe services are designed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal community organisations and grounded in self-determination.

Council's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is also informed by the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC outlines the universal civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that every child is entitled to and explains how adults and governments should act to ensure all children can enjoy all of their rights.

The 54 articles of the UNCRC cover all aspects of a child's rights. The rights enshrined in the UNCRC include the rights of every child to:

- Relax and play
- Freedom of expression
- Be safe from violence
- An education
- Protection of identity
- Sufficient standard of living
- Know their rights
- Health and health services.

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Merri-bek City Council context

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy aligns with the aims and priorities of the Merri-bek Council Plan and other key strategies and plans.

The **Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029** responds to the Merri-bek Community Vision for 2035: *Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.*

The Council Plan outlines five key strategic directions for Merri-bek over the next 4 years:

- Care for nature and climate resilience
- Healthy and inclusive communities
- Beautiful and liveable city
- Thriving economy and culture
- Engaging and responsible Council

The Council Plan also integrates five health and wellbeing priorities and two additional focus areas within the directions and initiatives of the plan:

- Improving mental wellbeing and social connection
- Increasing active living
- Tackling climate change and its impacts on health
- Preventing all forms of violence and discrimination
- Improving food systems
- Other areas
 - Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use
 - Increasing immunisations

The **Merri-bek Human Rights Policy 2016-2026** (revised in 2022) outlines Council's commitment to specific priority groups which are recognised as being at greatest risk of exclusion from social, economic and political life because of access barriers and discrimination:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People with Disability
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual-plus, Transgender and gender diverse, Queer or Questioning, Asexual and Aromantic, and Intersex people (LGBTIQ+)
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities.

In the 2022 refresh of the Human Rights Policy, Council identified the following additional priorities when considering human rights:

- An age and lifespan lens, with attention to children, young people and older people
- Poverty, inequality and socioeconomic status
- Climate change and climate justice
- Issues exacerbated by COVID-19
- Carers, volunteering and civic participation (unpaid caring/contributions).

Other key Council strategies and plans

A range of other Council strategies and plans outline commitments and priorities that support children, young people and families to thrive. Some of the key plans and strategies that support the priorities of this strategy include:

- Disability Action & Inclusion Plan 2022-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Library Strategy (new strategy due for endorsement in 2026)
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

Council services and supports for Children, Young People and Families

Council works in multiple ways to support children, young people and families. This includes:

- Service delivery
- Planning and coordination of services and infrastructure
- Advocacy on behalf of children, young people and families to other levels of government and other key stakeholders
- Engaging with children, young people and families to build their capacity and facilitate their influence over the issues and decisions that impact them

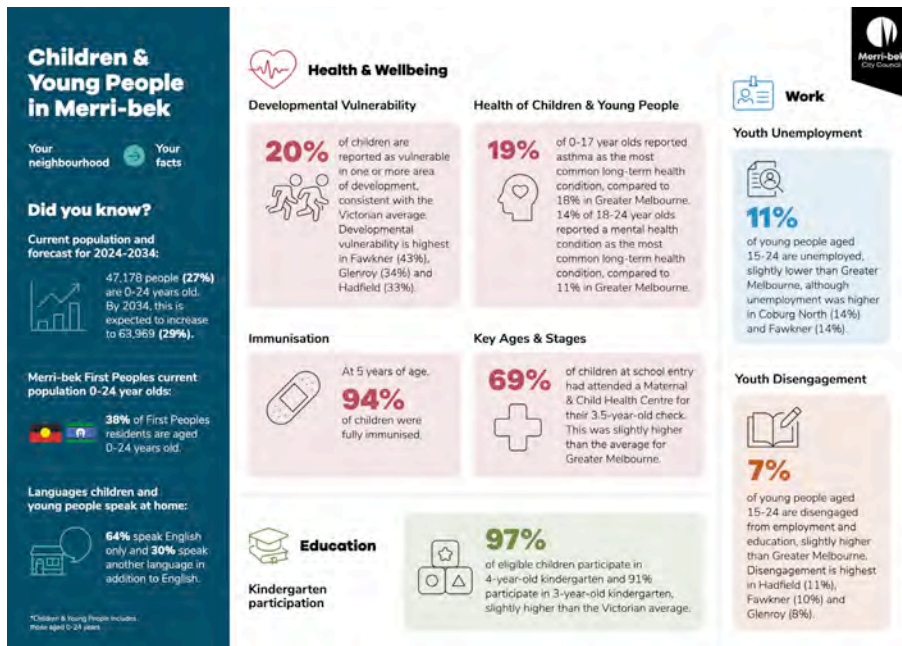
Council's services accompany families on a journey from the earliest days of a child's life through to young adulthood. This journey is not a linear progression through discrete services, it is a series of relationships, touchpoints and transitions, each building on the last. The aim is that families experience Council's services as a connected system providing support across a child's life, with universal services and targeted supports working together.

- Council's first contact with a new family is through the **universal Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service**, commencing with home visit in the first two weeks of a child's life and including ten structured visits at key ages and stages from birth to 3.5 years. MCH nurses provide evidence-based anticipatory guidance, the right information at the right time, on infant feeding, sleep, development, play, and family wellbeing.
- For families with additional needs, the **Enhanced MCH service** provides more intensive, targeted support from birth to three years.
- Council's **Immunisation service** provides the National Immunisation Program schedule from birth, recording vaccinations on the Australian Immunisation Register and supporting families to maintain their child's immunisation status. Immunisation is a whole-of-life program, with the schedule continuing through childhood and adolescence and then across the life course for priority populations.
- **First Time Parent Groups**, facilitated by MCH nurses, provide structured peer support and connection for new parents from the earliest months of their child's life. These groups are both a health and development resource and a community-building mechanism.

- As children move through the toddler and early childhood years, Council supports families through **Supported Playgroups** and **Family Day Care** and facilitates access to early learning services through **Kindergarten and Early Years Service registration, resourcing and support for early years services**, and **early years infrastructure planning and delivery**.
- The **Kindergarten Outreach Program** provides targeted support for families who may face barriers to kindergarten participation, including CALD families, Aboriginal families, and families experiencing disadvantage.
- Council maintains connection through **library programs and activities, partnerships with primary schools**, and civic participation initiatives such as **Children's Reference Group activities** and **Principals' Forums**. These touchpoints support learning, community connection and the development of young people's voice and agency.
- Council's **Youth team** provides programs and services for young people aged 12–25, including the **Youth Ambassador Program** and targeted **youth activities**. Council's youth services connect young people to employment pathways, mental health supports, creative opportunities and civic engagement.
- At every stage of this journey, Council works in partnership with the broader systems that support children and families as a core part of our approach to providing holistic and comprehensive support.

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Demographic overview



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How this Strategy was developed

This Strategy was informed by a community and stakeholder engagement process that engaged approximately 1,400 members of the Merri-bek community.

The engagement activities included:

- Surveys for different groups and ages, available online and in hard-copy
- Art activities for children aged 2-12
- 7 pop-ups at local community spaces and events around Merri-bek
- 3 workshops with multicultural families, and parents and carers of children living with disability
- 8 Focus Groups with community or stakeholder groups
- 4 briefing and feedback discussions with key stakeholder groups
- A workshop with Council staff from the Early Years and Youth Branch

The purpose of this engagement process was to:

- understand the key issues and challenges facing children, young people and families
- understand what is working well for children, young people and families and what Council could do better
- reach a diverse mix of local communities and provide opportunities for the broader community to provide feedback.

Demographic data collected during the engagement activities showed a strong representation of children and young people (70% aged under 18), a predominance of female participants (71%), and contributions from a wide range of suburbs, cultural backgrounds, and language groups. The engagement process included a focus on reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, people with a disability, LGBTQIA+ communities, migrant and refugee families, and service providers.

Key findings from this process, which have been critical in shaping this strategy include:

Things Merri-bek is doing well

- **Places & Spaces:** Parks, playgrounds, sporting facilities, community hubs, schools and libraries are highly valued. Children and families appreciate the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and inclusive community events.
- **Inclusion & Connection:** Merri-bek's strong sense of community, social cohesion, and celebration of diversity are seen as strengths.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Maternal Child Health services, sports programmes, and mental health support are appreciated.
- **Learning & Participation:** Early years services, playgroups, youth education, and community engagement initiatives are seen as strengths.

Issues and Challenges in Merri-bek

- Health & Wellbeing: Access to services, mental health issues, support for parents/carers, housing affordability and substance use are concerns.
- Places & Spaces: Cleanliness, safety, inclusive infrastructure, and availability of parks and playgrounds are important issues for the community.
- Traffic & Transportation: Road safety, congestion, accessibility, and cycling infrastructure are seen as needing improvement.
- Inclusion & Connection: Barriers to support and services for migrant and refugee families, discrimination, bullying, and support for women/girls were identified as issues.
- Financial Hardship: Cost of living and programs and services costs can be barriers to accessing services and participating in community life.
- Education, Employment & Youth Services: Access to services, employment pathways, school engagement, and resources are areas of concern.

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Strategic priorities

Priority 1: Health and wellbeing

We will support children, young people and families to have good physical and mental health, to feel safe and secure in their homes and communities, to have their essential materials needs met, and to have access to the services and supports they need to maintain their wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Play and physical activity:** Support children and young people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and genders to enjoy a wide range of opportunities to play and be active, and to access to community infrastructure that meets their needs.
2. **Being safe and feeling cared for:** Support children and young people to feel safe and cared for within their families and communities.
3. **Access to health services and supports:** Support children, young people and families to have access to affordable services and supports for their physical and mental health.
4. **Basic needs met:** Support children, young people and families to have access to secure, stable housing, nutritious food, essential services and other basic needs.
5. **A clean and healthy environment:** Support work to create cleaner and greener environments for children, young people and families to enjoy, and take action on climate change.

Community priorities this responds to

- Affordable and accessible health services including mental health services
- Affordable and accessible sports and recreation infrastructure and opportunities for all ages, abilities and genders
- Supporting women and girls' access to sports opportunities
- Safe, clean and accessible parks, playgrounds and open spaces, with facilities and infrastructure that is accessible and inclusive of varied ages and abilities
- Opportunities to be active outside – walking, riding and skating
- Safe roads, pedestrian safety, school crossings, cycling infrastructure
- Mental health needs of parents and families in a context of financial stress, isolation, and work/life balance challenges
- Cost of living, housing affordability, homelessness supports, food security, cost of services

Council strategies and plans this aligns with

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Healthy and inclusive communities
 - Beautiful and liveable city
 - Health and wellbeing priorities
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this aligns with

- The Nest domains: Healthy; Material Basics; Valued, Loved & Safe
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: strong sense of wellbeing
- Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures: Victoria's five-year action plan to support children and young people to be healthy, active and well

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- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Wellbeing in Victoria: Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health 2025–2035
- National Perinatal Mental Health Guideline
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's rights to play and join a range of leisure activities, to be safe from violence, to have a sufficient standard of living, to have access to health care
- Victorian Maternal and Child Health Program Guidelines
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia (2025-2030)
- Victorian Early Years Compact

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Priority 2: Connection and inclusion

We will support children, young people and families to feel connected, included and supported, to participate in their communities, and to have a say over the decisions and issues that impact their lives.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Inclusive and connected communities:** Support children, young people and families to connect with each other and with the broader community through inclusive and accessible community activities that build connection and inclusion.
2. **Meaningful participation and influence:** Provide children, young people and families with opportunities for meaningful participation and influence over decisions and issues which impact them.
3. **Inclusive spaces, services and activities:** Support children, young people and families to access welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe public spaces, services and activities.

Community priorities this responds to

- More inclusive and accessible community infrastructure.
- Addressing discrimination and racism - becoming a more tolerant, diverse and cohesive community
- Building a sense of community and belonging through opportunities to bring people together to celebrate and support each other
- Inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible programs and events, including for migrant, refugee, First Nations and LGBTIQIA+ communities, women and girls, and people with disability
- Supports for parents and carers
- More activities, programs and events to support children, young people and families to participate and connect
- Ongoing and deep engagement by Council with the community
- More comprehensive and inclusive information sharing and promotion of Council services
- Addressing additional and specific barriers that migrant families face accessing services or connecting with community
- More youth-specific spaces

Council strategies and plans this aligns with

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Healthy and inclusive communities
 - Thriving economy and culture
 - Engaging and responsible Council
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- LGBTIQIA+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Disability Action & Inclusion Plan 2022-2026

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this aligns with

- The Nest domains: Identity & Culture; Participating
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: strong sense of identity; connected with and contribute to their world
- Victorian Youth Strategy
- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's rights to meet with other children and join groups, and to have a say over decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account.
- Victorian Maternal and Child Health Program Guidelines
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia (2025-2030)
- Victorian Early Years Compact

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Priority 3: Learning and thriving

We will support children, young people and families to develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to thrive throughout their lives.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Early childhood development and learning:** Support children and young people's learning and development from early childhood through to young adulthood.
2. **Developing skills for life:** Support children and young people to develop the skills and capabilities they need to thrive throughout their lives.
3. **Support through life stage transitions:** Support children, young people and families through their major life stage transitions, including transitions through the education system, entering the workforce, and becoming parents.

Community priorities this priority responds to

- Affordable and accessible early childhood services (kindergarten, early learning centres and playgroups)
- School engagement/engaging with learning
- School and family partnerships
- Better support for those struggling with school transitions
- Equipping young people to succeed through mentoring and life skills development
- Employment opportunities and pathways into local employment
- Inclusive lifelong learning including for parenting skill development

Council strategies and plans this priority aligns with:

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Thriving economy and culture
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Libraries Strategy

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this priority aligns with and responds to:

- The Nest domains: Learning
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: confidence and involved learners
- Victorian Best Start, Best Life reforms
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework revision and Early Years Learning Framework 2.0
- Victorian Youth Strategy
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- NDIS reforms and introduction of the Thriving Kids Program
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's right to an education.

Delivery, monitoring and evaluation of this strategy

Implementation Plans

This Strategy outlines Council's priorities for improving outcomes for children, young people and families over the next four years. Delivery of this Strategy will be led through the development of Implementation Plans, beginning with an initial two-year Implementation Plan for 2026-2027.

The Implementation Plan will outline the actions that Council will take to progress the strategic objectives across each of the priorities in this Strategy. The Implementation Plan will be developed through a cross-Council process to identify actions that will be led by Departments across Council. It will include a range of actions that Council will take to deliver the strategic objectives, including actions related to service delivery, partnerships, community engagement and advocacy priorities.

Monitoring and Reporting

Council will review the progress of the Children Young People and Families Strategy annually.

The Implementation plan will also be reviewed and refreshed annually, and a report will be provided to Council outlining progress in implementing the key actions.

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Appendix: Key references

Council's plans, strategies and policies

- Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029
- Merri-bek Human Rights Policy 2016-2026 (revised 2022)
- Disability Action & Inclusion Plan 2022-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Library Strategy (new strategy due for endorsement in 2026)
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

State and Federal policy, strategy and frameworks

- Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms, Victorian Government
- Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Department of Education, Australian Government (2022)
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), Family Safe Victoria (2018)
- Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures: Victoria's five-year action plan to support children and young people to be healthy, active and well, Victorian Government (2021)
- Maternal and Child Health Service guidelines, Department of Health, Victoria (2021)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, National Indigenous Australians Agency (2021)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government (2020)
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, National Mental Health Commission (2021)
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia 2025-2030, Australian Centre for Disease Control (2025)
- National Perinatal Mental Health Guideline, COPE: Centre for Perinatal Excellence (2023)
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-23, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government (2017)
- Our promise, Your future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victoria (2022)
- The Nest Wellbeing Framework, ARACY: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, (2013)
- Victorian Child Safe Standards, Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2016)
- Wellbeing in Victoria: A Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health 2025-2035, Department of Health, Victoria (2025)

International agreements and frameworks

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



Community Engagement Summary Report

Children, Young People and Families Strategy
2026-2029



Acknowledgement of traditional custodianship

*Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the
Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area known as Merri-bek.
We pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, as well as to all First
Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.*

Version control

Version	Date	Author	Reason	Section
0.1	12.11.2025	A Howard	New Report	All
0.2	11.12.2025	A Howard	Updates and edits	All
1.0	02.01.2026	A Howard	Updates and edits	All

Prepared by



The Commentarium was engaged by Merri-bek City Council to support the independent analysis of community and stakeholder feedback for this project, and to prepare this report.

At The Commentarium our focus is supporting government with the crucial steps of gathering, organising, analysing, and presenting community feedback. We do this to honour the efforts of everyone involved, and to maximise the influence of feedback on project decisions.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 will replace the current plan – which was Merri-bek City Council's first integrated plan looking at children, young people and families. Development of the new Strategy will be guided by two stages of community and stakeholder engagement - to ensure that feedback from children, young people, families, and key stakeholders is central to shaping the Strategy.

Between August and October 2025, the first engagement stage was delivered, with a diverse range of communications and engagement activities. These included a dedicated project page on the 'Conversations Merri-bek' website (available in 15 languages), posters and postcards distributed across community spaces, articles in local newsletters, targeted social media campaigns, and direct outreach to existing community groups.

To collect feedback, the Council offered online and printed surveys tailored for different age groups, art activities for children, pop-up events in high-traffic areas, workshops with multicultural families and those living with disability, focus groups with key community and reference groups, and briefings with stakeholders such as the Youth Ambassadors, Council staff, and First Nations representatives.

Participation

By delivering almost 50 engagement events, the engagement process successfully reached a broad cross-section of the Merri-bek community, with nearly 4,100 comments collected from approximately 1,400 participants. Participation statistics highlight the effectiveness of the Council's multi-channel approach:

- **e-Newsletters:** Over 5,200 subscribers received project updates.
- **Social media:** Regular posts reached 27,144 views; paid campaigns targeted multicultural communities, achieving 8,500 unique views and 455 click-throughs.
- **Project Website:** 2,900 views, 1,797 unique visitors, and 64 contributions.
- **Surveys:** 592 comments collected.
- **Arts Activities:** 1,835 comments, engaging young children.
- **Pop-ups:** 788 comments from community members who might not otherwise participate.
- **Workshops:** 338 comments, fostering in-depth discussion.
- **Focus Groups:** 436 comments, capturing diverse perspectives.
- **Briefings:** 39 comments, providing specialist advice.

Demographic data (where available) showed a strong representation of children and young people (70% under 18), a predominance of female participants (71%), and contributions from a wide range of suburbs, cultural backgrounds, and language groups. The process was intentionally inclusive, targeting groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disability, LGBTQIA+ communities, migrant and refugee families, and service providers.

Key Findings

Thematic analysis of nearly 4,100 comments revealed the following key insights for children, young people and families in Merri-bek.

Things Merri-bek is doing well:

- **Places & Spaces:** Parks, playgrounds, sporting facilities, community hubs, schools, and libraries were highly valued. Children and families appreciated the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and inclusive community events.
- **Inclusion & Connection:** Strong sense of community, social cohesion, and celebration of diversity were noted. Council's efforts in multicultural and First Nations inclusion were recognised.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Maternal Child Health services, sports programmes, and mental health support were praised, with safety and emotional wellbeing highlighted by participants.
- **Learning & Participation:** Early years services, playgroups, youth education, and community engagement initiatives were seen as strengths.

Issues and Challenges in Merri-bek:

- **Health & Wellbeing:** Access to services, mental health, support for parents/carers, housing affordability, substance use, and safety were major concerns.
- **Places & Spaces:** Cleanliness, safety, inclusive infrastructure, and availability of parks and playgrounds were recurring issues.
- **Traffic & Transportation:** Road safety, congestion, accessibility, and cycling infrastructure were highlighted as areas needing improvement.
- **Inclusion & Connection:** Barriers for migrant and refugee families, discrimination, bullying, and support for women/girls were identified.
- **Financial Hardship:** Cost of living, programs and services costs impacted families' ability to access services and participate in community life – leading to issues of isolation, and deprivation.
- **Education, Employment & Youth Services:** Access to services, employment pathways, school engagement, and resources were areas of concern.

Most critical issues:

Access to affordable health and mental health services, safe and inclusive public spaces, and support for vulnerable and diverse community groups were the most frequently and urgently raised.

Improvements proposed: Advice & statistics

Places & Spaces

- 602 solution comments (38% of the 1,584 comments) told us that improved places and spaces would enhance the lives of children, young people and families.
- Top requests: more trees, shade, accessible design, cleaner and safer public areas, more community hubs, better connectivity, recreation opportunities.

Inclusion & Connection

- 427 comments (25%) talked about becoming a more tolerant, diverse and cohesive community, through opportunities to bring people together to celebrate, or support each other.
- Calls for more inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible programs and events, emphasis on migrant, refugee, First Nations, and LGBTQIA+ communities, women/girls, and people with disability as well as extra support for parents/carers.

Health & Wellbeing

- 316 comments (20%) focused on health: more affordable health, mental health, and maternal child health services, as well as housing and food security.
- 51% of these (161 comments) specifically requested more, or better access to, sports infrastructure and programming for all ages, abilities and genders.

Education, Employment & Participation

- 6% of solutions (101 comments) sought better education support, job placements, life skills workshops, and affordable childcare/playgroups.
- Requests included ongoing and deeper engagement with the community; more information sharing (promotion of Council services and sharing of more information in different languages about topics such as parenting skills, health and food literacy); and better support for those struggling with school transitions.

Affordability & Access

- Many comments highlighted the need to reduce costs for services and events, and to address long waitlists for health and support services, ensuring equitable access across all suburbs.

Next steps

The feedback collected through this engagement process will be used to help draft the new Strategy. A further round of engagement to test the draft Strategy is planned for early 2026.

Where possible, insights that we have collected that fall outside of the scope of the draft Strategy will be shared with relevant parts of Merri-bek City Council to advocate for these community concerns and ideas.

We thank everyone who contributed to this engagement process.

Introduction

Project Background

The Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025 was Merri-bek City Council's first integrated plan to support local children and young people from birth to adulthood. We are now developing a new 4-year integrated plan.

Merri-bek City Council wants every child to:

- have a strong start
- feel safe
- succeed in education and learning, and
- have opportunities to participate and thrive in the community.

The new **Children, Young People and Families Strategy** will build on what has worked well in the past 4 years. It will also be developed using community and stakeholder feedback – particularly ideas on what Council could do to address new or ongoing challenges for children, young people and families.

What we set out to achieve

There are **two planned stages of community engagement** to help develop this new strategy. The first stage focuses on identifying what is working, and what needs to be done better. The second stage will test a draft strategy with community and stakeholders. The first stage was completed in October 2025 and is the focus of this report.

The purpose of this engagement process was to:

- understand the critical or key issues and challenges facing children, young people and families
- understand what is working well, and what Council could do better to support these community members
- reach a diverse mix of local communities, and
- provide opportunities for the broader community to share their feedback.

Purpose of this report

This report outlines how Council engaged the community, and summarises both who we heard from, and the feedback that was collected through this planned process.

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Before reading this report

The following elements should be considered when reading this report:

Privacy

- Feedback from the community is carefully presented to avoid sharing any personal or private information – in accordance with Victorian privacy laws and principles. To know more about how Merri-bek manages and protects your private information you can visit: <https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/footer/privacy>.

Analysis and presentation

- The information and views presented in this report are a summarised version of participant feedback from across the various engagement activities. Feedback may be paraphrased for clarity but is not amended beyond corrections to spelling and grammar. As such, some information and views may be factually incorrect, unfeasible, or outside of the scope of the project.
- This report summarises feedback from a large data set, it highlights data trends and key insights from many participants but does not preclude the project team from considering the community feedback in its original form.

Inclusion and diversity

- The information in this report is based on qualitative research, focused on those interested in, or affected by, the specific topics of the project. It does not necessarily reflect the views of a statistically representative sample of the broader community.
- Merri-bek City Council strives to include diverse voices in our engagement activities. We acknowledge, however, that some people may have experienced barriers to participating in the activities outlined in this report – including those living with disability, parts of the multicultural community, and others.
- This report summarises the feedback from the planned engagement activities included in Council's engagement plan. It does not include feedback provided to Council through other community activities or channels.

Influencing decisions

- It is important to acknowledge that community feedback is incredibly important, as are many other inputs into a decision-making process. Other inputs (such as budget, time constraints, feasibility and competing priorities) must be balanced as part of delivering a decision. Details on how this report will be included in the decision-making process, are included in the 'Next Steps' section at the end of the report.

How we engaged the community

Between 26 August and 26 October 2025, we delivered a range of communications activities to let the Merri-bek community and stakeholders know about this project. We also delivered a range of community engagement activities to collect community and stakeholder feedback.

Communications activities

To get the word out about the engagement process, we did the following:



'Conversations Merri-bek'

Hosted a project page to share information and collect feedback.

Council's dedicated engagement website '[Conversations Merri-bek](#)' included a page for this project.

The page included information on the engagement process, a timeline, contact details, documents about the previous plan, children's activities to download, as well as an interactive tool for posting ideas and voting or commenting on other peoples' ideas.

Translation of the page is available in 15 languages other than English.



Posters

Displayed in relevant spaces around Merri-bek.

Posters about the project and the opportunity to provide feedback were placed in areas such as:

- Libraries
- Customer Service centres
- Neighbourhood houses
- Maternal Child Health centres
- Immunisation centres
- Playgroups
- Early Learning centres
- Kindergartens
- Community hubs

QR codes directed readers to the 'Conversations' project page. Translations were included on these posters.

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Postcards

Distributed to relevant spaces around Merri-bek.

Postcards about the project and the opportunity to provide feedback were placed in the same areas as the project posters.

Postcards included QR codes to direct people to the 'Conversations' project page.

These postcards also included translations.



Newsletter

Article in the Merri-bek Community News.

The **Merri-bek Community News** is printed and delivered to all Merri-bek Houses each quarter.

A short article was included in the August edition (on page 10) describing the project, and inviting readers to participate through Merri-bek's community engagement website 'Conversations Merri-bek'.



e-Newsletters


Were used to inform the local community.

Council-owned and other community newsletters were used to share project information with the Merri-bek community, and invite feedback. Newsletters include:

- My Merri-bek
- Local Primary and Secondary School newsletters
- Northern Families Newsletter

The **My Merri-bek e-newsletter** is sent out to subscribers every two weeks and includes information about projects, initiatives and events. Information about this project was included in the newsletter on:

- 4 September 2025
- 16 October 2025.




15 Posts

And 1 campaign on Merri-bek City Council's social media channels.

We used a mix of paid advertising and regular posts through Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

15 social media posts were published between 27 August and 21 October.

The paid campaign ran from 22 September to 8 October. Paid posts were available in 7 languages other than English, based on the user. Languages included Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepali, Simplified Chinese, Turkish and Urdu.



Existing Groups


Were directly communicated with about this engagement opportunity.

Utilising programs and networks run by Council, we used email and messaging to reach out to existing reference and advisory groups including:

- CALD (Culturally and linguistically diverse) Community Connectors
- Youth Connectors, and
- Community Family Group (via Whatsapp).

Engagement activities

To hear from the community and collect feedback we did the following:



Surveys

For different groups and ages, available online and in printed form.

Surveys were available in different forms to engage children, young people, parents and families, as well as Service Providers and Merri-bek community members. The surveys all focused on asking key questions, such as:

- **What are the big issues/challenges for children, young people and families?**
- **What is Merri-bek doing well to support these groups?**
- **What could Merri-bek do better or focus on improving for these groups?**

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Art Activities

For children to provide feedback for this project.

Two different art-based workbooks were available at a range of different events (and online) for children. The questions varied slightly, based on the age group, but focused on what children like about Merri-bek, and what would make Merri-bek a place better for children. There were two activity options:

- [Early Years \(Children aged 2 to 8 years\)](#)
- [Children aged 9 to 12 years.](#)



7x Pop-ups

At local community spaces around Merri-bek.

Through August and October, seven pop-ups were delivered at areas with high foot traffic around Merri-bek. These were designed to increase public awareness of the engagement process, and to collect feedback from local community members using corflute posters. Pop-ups were held at:

- LGBTQIA+ Families (23 August 2025)
- Coburg Farmers Market (20 September 2025)
- Glenroy Library (24 September 2025)
- Fawkner Leisure Centre (27 September 2025)
- Glenroy Hub (2 October 2025)
- Brunswick Baths (4 October 2025)
- Welcome Baby to Country event (22 October 2025)



3x Workshops

Focused on multicultural families, and those living with disability.

Workshops were held in September with targeted community groups – to make it easier for these groups to provide feedback.

We held two workshops with young people, families, parents and carers with multicultural backgrounds.

A third workshop focused on hearing from parents and carers of children living with disability.



8x Focus Groups

With identified community, stakeholder or reference groups and using existing networks.

Throughout August and September, we held focus group discussions with eight different groups. These groups were identified in our planning process as key to the success of any future strategy. Groups included:

- Merri-bek Youth Ambassadors
- Queer Collective (through Oxygen)
- Fawkner Futures
- School Principals
- Children
- Service Providers, and
- Staff from the Early Years and Youth Branch of Council.



4x Briefings

With key stakeholders.

Discussions were held with identified stakeholders on the engagement process, and to collect feedback and advice. These were delivered to stakeholders who needed to know about the project, may not have had an ability to engage in other activities, or had an important role to play in shaping or promoting the engagement process. Stakeholders included:

- Youth Ambassadors
- First Nations Advisory Committee
- Merri-bek Council staff

A NOTE ON ACTIVITY TIMINGS



Some activities were undertaken outside of the formal engagement period to take advantage of pre-planned community events. Activities outside of the engagement period included:

- Community Vision Activity (12 December 2024)
- Glenroy Festival (4 May 2025)

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Project engagement (reach and participation)

Through our different communications and engagement activities we connected with lots of community members and stakeholders. **In total we were able to collect feedback from nearly 1,400 participants.**

The table below provides some details and insights on the activities where we collected statistics.

Activity	Engagement	Insights
e-Newsletters	5,200+ Subscribers to the 'My Merri-bek' e-newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The My Merri-bek e-newsletter is a fortnightly newsletter coordinated by the communications team at Merri-bek City Council.
Social Media Posts (Regular)	27,144 views of the content 246 likes, comments or shares 19,243 unique users saw post	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three posts with the highest number of views were all shared through Instagram. The future effectiveness of this channel may, however, be affected by the Federal Government's upcoming social media ban for children under 16 years.
Social Media Posts (Paid/Campaign)	Around 8,500 unique views 455 click-throughs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The paid campaign targeted multicultural community members in Merri-bek. The Nepali community had the highest reach at 2,134 unique views. Greek and Turkish-speaking community members were the most likely to click through, however in both groups most click-throughs were by people aged 65+.
'Conversations Merri-bek' website	2,900 views 1,797 unique visitors 64 contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The largest proportion (47.7%) of visitors came to the website directly – meaning they acquired the web address via an email, untracked newsletter link, or used a QR code to access the project page. 26.5% of visitors were referred via a social media campaign, and a further 9.2% via organic social media posts. 45 visitors (1.8%) made at least one contribution on the project page. The 'Gather' tool was used to collect community feedback and allowed community members to interact with each other's ideas.

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Activity	Engagement	Insights
Surveys	592 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys were effective in collecting individual feedback and demographic information in a private way (i.e., without other participants hearing or reading their feedback).
Arts Activities	1,835 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two arts activities were very successful tools for engaging with young children. Sometimes, however, it wasn't clear if the comments were from the parent or the child.
Pop-ups	788 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pop-ups were useful in collecting insights from 'non-self-selecting' community members. In other words, those who may not otherwise hear about the engagement process or contribute. Pop-up locations, and the audience at those locations may sometimes show a natural bias, so locations must always be carefully selected. For example, people who attend pop-up at a festival may be more likely to tell us to have more festivals.
Workshops	338 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our workshops worked well in generating more in-depth discussion and sharing more project-specific information. Workshops also provide an opportunity for networking and collaboration as a secondary benefit.
Focus Groups	436 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups provided a great opportunity to hear in-depth feedback from community members or stakeholders. Focus groups also allow others to hear different perspectives and points of view.
Briefings	39 comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings are an excellent way to gather highly specialist advice. Comments on Asylum Seekers and First Nations were greatly appreciated in this process, adding a layer of depth to the intersections of diversity, health, and wellbeing that may otherwise have been missed.

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Who we heard from

Targeted groups of the Merri-Bek community

This engagement process was heavily focused on hearing from children, young people and their families. As such, the communications and engagement activities were planned with several specific groups, stakeholders and segments in mind.

Examples include:

- Children and young people
- Parents and families
- Service Providers
- Young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- People with disability
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- Migrant, refugee and faith communities
- Women, girls and gender diverse communities
- Council staff and decision-makers.

Participant demographics

Across the different activities we delivered for this project, we collected demographic data about our participants where possible. We were able to collect some specific demographic data from some of the 1,383 participants we heard from. These demographics are explored below.

Age



Participants tended to be younger, with available data skewed towards under 18-year-olds.

We were able to collect age data from 479 specific participants.

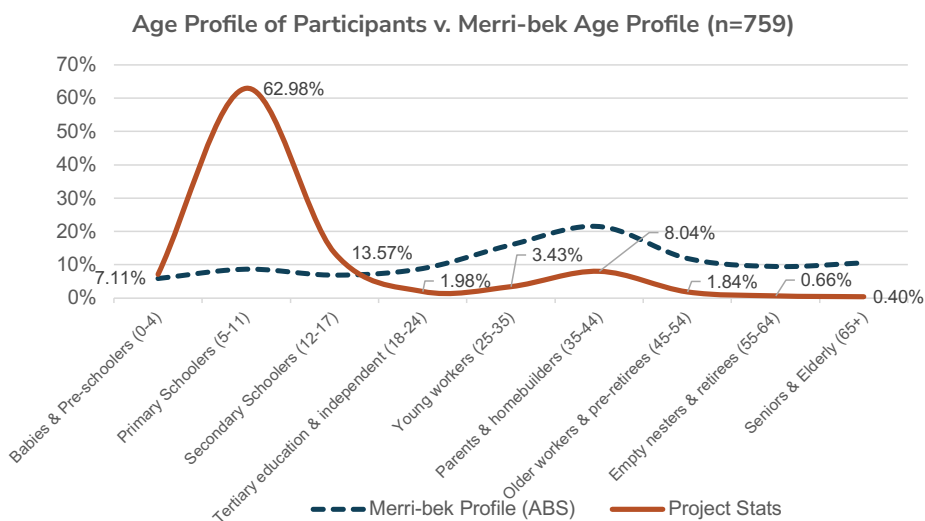
For some activities, we simply recorded the age range of a group of participants against the captured comments, bringing the number of data points to 759. The age-related data was brought together and compared with 2021 Census data on the age profile of Merri-bek.

More than two-thirds (70.1%) of ages were 0 to 11 years old, particularly ages 5 to 11 (63%).

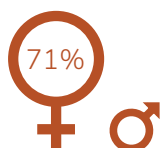
The graph below shows the high proportion of the ages from members of the community aged under 18 years. This was an overrepresentation compared with the age ranges in the broader community of Merri-bek – where under 18-year-olds make up about 21.5%.

This is, however, appropriate and consistent with the planning and approach we undertook – focusing in on the voices of children and young people to inform the new strategy.

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Gender



While not much gender data was available, the data was heavily weighted toward female participants.

In total, we collected gender data from 120 specific participants. This was compared with the gender balance in Merri-bek from the 2021 Census. **In the available data, 70.8% was 'Woman/Girl', 25% was 'Man/Boy' and a further 1.4% was 'Gender Diverse'.**

Across Merri-bek, the Census data shows females make up 51.3% of the population, and males represent 48.7% – making the participants in this project heavily biased towards local women.

Although the volume of data is low, the bias towards female participants is a common feature in engagement on child, families, and maternal health.



Image: Participants at the Children's Forum

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Residential suburb

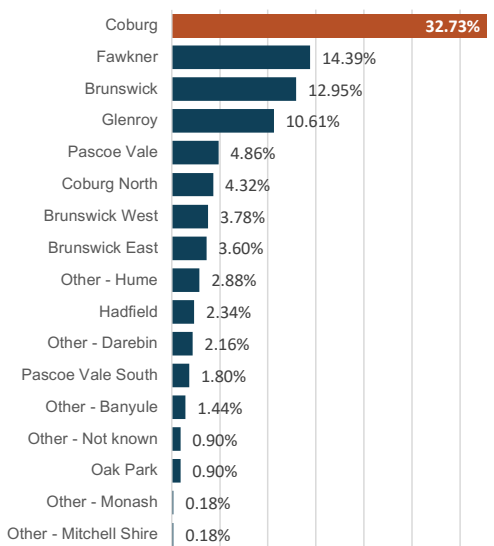


Most contributions (92%) were from people living in Merri-bek, and commonly from Coburg (32.8%).

We had 556 suburb data points, the most common suburbs were Coburg, Fawkner, Brunswick and Glenroy.

'Other' suburbs are grouped into local government areas. The highest number of 'other' comments were from the Hume area, making up nearly 3% of the data.

Residential Suburb (n=556)



Country of birth

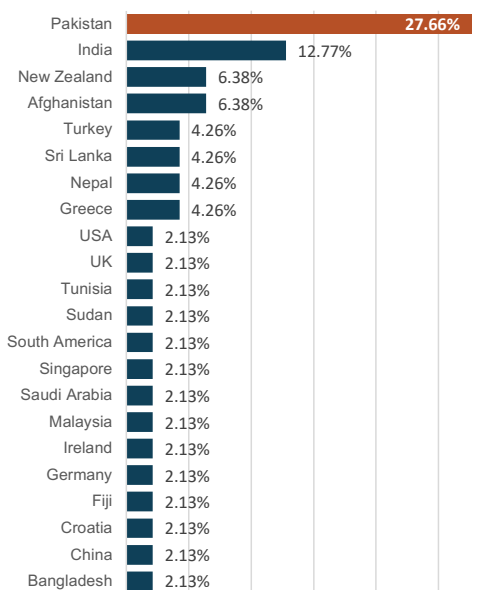


Of the 47 participants who shared this information with us, the highest proportion were born in Pakistan (27.8%), followed by India (12.8%).

Participants born in Pakistan were more likely to be aged 25 to 35, and female. Indian participants were more like to be slightly older 25 to 44, and split male/female evenly.

Please note: Children were not asked about country of birth.

Country of Birth (n=47)



Spoken languages



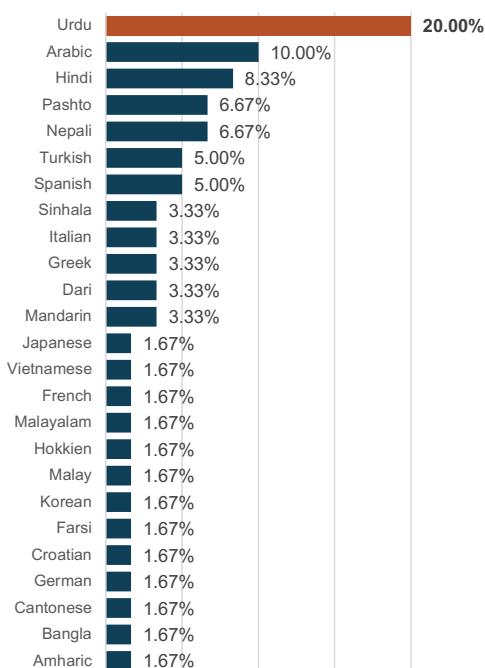
The most common non-English language spoken by participants at home was Urdu (20%), followed by Arabic (10%).

We received 60 data points for this question. Urdu was the most common language, associated with participants who told us they were aged 25 to 44, were born in Pakistan or India, and who now live in Fawkner, Glenroy or Hadfield areas.

Arabic speakers were a similar age (25 to 54). They told us they were born in Pakistan, Sudan or Tunisia, and now live in the areas of Glenroy and Oak Park.

Please note: Children were not asked about language spoken at home.

Non-English Languages Spoken At Home (n=60)



Diversity

'I am a parent/guardians of children' was the most selected statement, followed by 'I am a person living with disability'.

Please note: Children were not asked this question.

We received 91 responses to this question - where participants were invited to selected any of the provided statements that related to them. Out of respect for privacy, this question was only asked in formats such as surveys, so that responses were not visible to other participants.

The most commonly selected statement (making up 73.7%) of responses was 'I am a parent/guardian of children'. The statements and their numbers of responses are shown below.

- 'I am a parent/guardian of children' (73.7%)
- 'I am a person living with disability' (11%)
- 'I am a LGBTQIA+ community member' (8.8%)
- 'I care for a person with disability' (5.5%)
- 'I am experiencing homelessness' (1.1%)

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What we heard

In our engagement activities we asked participants to share their thoughts based on three key questions – what’s working well in Merri-bek, what are the key issues and challenges, and how can Merri-bek provide better support. In total, we reviewed and themed nearly 4,100 comments. Responses to the three key questions used across our engagement activities are explored below using thematic analysis.

A NOTE ON THEMATIC ANALYSIS

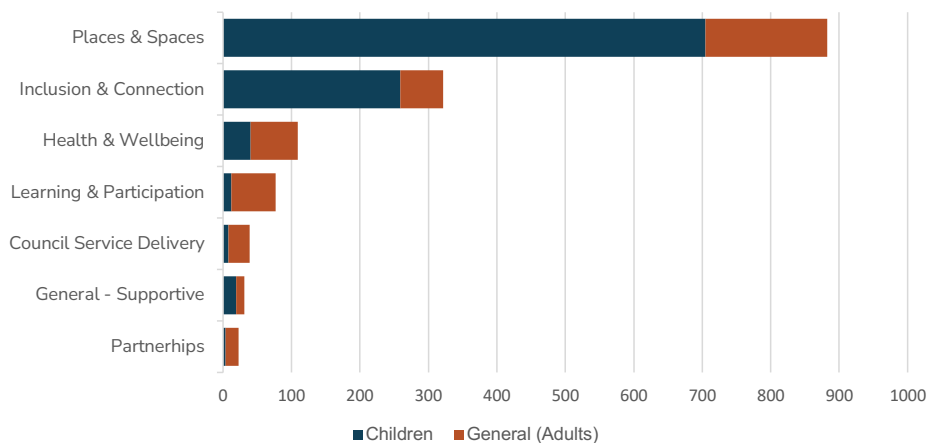


The responses to these key questions are explored below using thematic analysis. This means that comments were categorised into themes, and sub-themes, to help us understand what the most common topics were. Where comments talked about more than one theme they have been counted against each relevant theme. This means that the total number of comments is greater than the total number of participants.

Topic 1: Successes and positives in Merri-bek

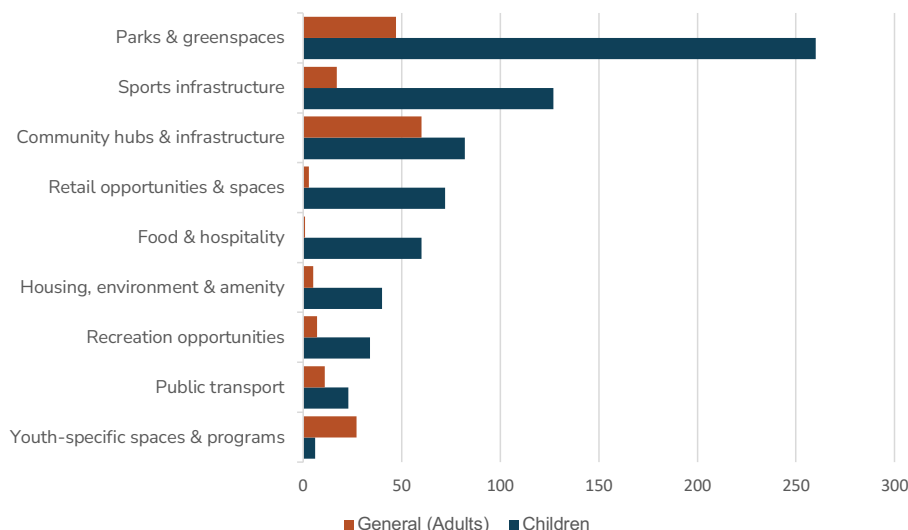
Most children and young participants were asked a simplified question: what they liked about living in Merri-bek. Most adults, Service Providers and the general community were asked a more complex question – what Council is currently doing well to support children, young people and families. **In total, 1,482 comments were analysed for this question. This was made up of 1,046 responses to the simplified question, and 436 responses to the more complex question.** The graph below shows the key themes from these responses, broken down to show the number of comments from the question targeted at children, and adults respectively. Themes are explored below.

Key themes from ALL responses: Success Question (n=1,482)



Theme 1: Places & spaces

Sub-themes in 'Place & Spaces' (n=882)



Although for different reasons, in both versions of this question, most comments (882, or 59.5%) related to the 'places and spaces' of Merri-bek.

Children and young people commonly talked about a love of local plants and animals (particularly around Merri Creek), parks and playgrounds, sporting facilities (particularly pools), options for recreational activities (such as running, walking and cycling), community hubs, schools and libraries.

'Close to everything; so many different schools; good food; nice people; green spaces; close to hospital, sporting grounds and shops; Nice houses; clean pools; great police; lots of carnivals; fun community events and sporting clubs' (11yr old, Pascoe Vale South).

Parents and families agreed that parks, greenspace, community hubs, and infrastructure like libraries were being successfully delivered in Merri-bek.

'I like how progressive Merri-Bek is. Events like First Nations storytelling and LGBTQIA+ library sessions and representation of diversity is important to us' (35-44yr old, Coburg).

Others such as council staff, and education and Service Providers talked more about the youth-specific spaces and programs.

'Free youth programs, workshops, and social activities that allow young people to engage, build skills, make friends, and be part of their community' (Service Provider).

Theme 2: Inclusion & Connection

In total, there were 321 comments (21.7%) about the success of Merri-bek in inclusion and connection. Of these, 259 responses were to the simplified question and 62 were to the general question.

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Children talked positively about their school community, their neighbours as well as the broader Merri-bek community (49% of comments).

'[I like] Merri creek, walk[ing] to school, nice people, lots of friends, look after everyone in the community' (7yr old, Coburg).

The idea of social cohesion, diversity and belonging was reflected in the ways children and young people talked about community behaviours.

'I like how welcoming the community is' (16-18yr old, Queer Collective).

Adults agreed, tying in how we celebrate our diverse communities.

'Multicultural and inclusive programs that acknowledge and celebrate' (Glenroy Library Pop-up)

Service Providers highlighted Council's successful efforts at inclusion, and particularly acknowledgement of Traditional Owners.

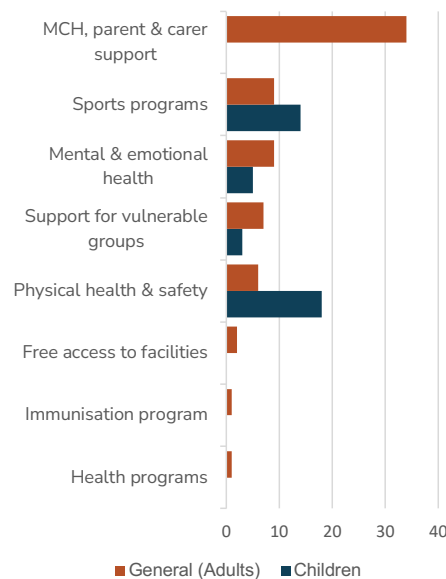
'The inclusion of multicultural and First Nations perspectives is so visible. Of course, it can always be improved on, but it's so seen by our community. For example, the flying of the Palestinian flag gave such comfort to our families and children' (Service Provider).

Theme 3: Health & wellbeing

In total comments about health and wellbeing made up 7.4% of the data set (109 comments). Of these, 40 responses were to the simplified question, and 69 were to the general question.

The most common feedback was support for the Maternal Child Health (MCH) work of Council (31.2%) and support for parents and carers.

Sub-themes in 'Health & Wellbeing' (n=109)



'I was impressed by the maternal & child health service (Sussex Neighbourhood House). They were a valuable resource, easy to book or rearrange and provided a wealth of information...' (35-44yr old, Pascoe Vale South).

Sports programs to support connection, health and wellbeing were highlighted by adults and children.

'The basketball community is very nice and welcoming' (Basketball event survey).

Sports and sports programs that were specifically mentioned included:

- Running programs
- Swimming programs
- Basketball
- Community sports
- Netball
- Football and soccer
- Cricket, and
- Swimming.

Principals and Council staff talked particularly about services that support mental and emotional health.

'Wellbeing teams in schools: multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary (nurse, mental health, social workers, psych) wrap-around support and good links with council and support services' (School Principals workshop).

When children talked about mental and emotional health, it was commonly in the context of finding Merri-bek a peaceful or calming environment.

'I go to school in Merri-Bek, I like how peaceful and calm Fawkner is and the greenery' (11yr old, Mickleham).

Children also talked about safety (18 comments) – about Merri-bek being a safe place to be a child.

'I really like the friendly community, the libraries and the safe areas. I love that I can feel safe walking alone' (9-12yr old, Children's Forum).

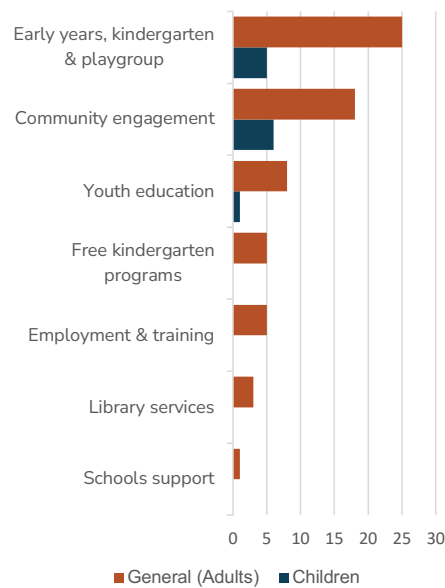
Theme 4: Learning & participation

In total, there were 77 comments (5.2%) about learning and participation. Of these, 65 responses were to the general question and 12 were to the simplified question.

Early years, kindergarten and playgroup services made up more than a third of responses (30 comments, 39%), particularly from adults.

'Council running the playgroups is really appreciated. During school holidays different types of event and activities are very good. Council [is] doing good in terms of providing free kinder and playgroups for everyone' (25-34yr old, Glenroy, Supported Playgroup).

Sub-themes in 'Learning & Participation' (n=77)



Children and adults talked about the community engagement by Merri-bek in a positive light. These comments were 31.2% of the feedback in this theme.

'Children's reference group: children feeling very good to have a voice' (School Principals workshop).

Youth education, employment and training comments were also raised (18.2%) – mainly in the general question asked of adults.

'First of three municipalities to provide a work placement policy for young people, which is offered to those in Merri-bek and inner Northern Regions' (Service Provider).

We also heard that participants appreciate the free kinder programs (6.5%), and library services (3.9%) such as free access to books, media, free spaces and programs such as the 'makers space'.

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Themes 5 & 6: Council service delivery & Partnerships

These two themes together represent just 4.2% of responses (62 comments). The majority of these were answered through the general question (by adults).

Within both, related sub-themes emerged. **'Staff capability & quality assurance'** made up 25.6% of responses about Council service delivery, followed closely by **'Coordination of services'** (23.1%).

'Over the last 4 years real increase in cross communicating well across services and promoting to each other across age spans' (Council staff).

Although out of scope for this strategy, children talked about waste management as a positive for Merri-bek.

'Merri-bek is recycling really well and this is important to the young people' (13-16yr old, Glenroy College).

Tied closely to the idea of coordinated services, 39.1% of comments in the **'Partnerships'** theme talked about good **'collaboration'** with Merri-bek.

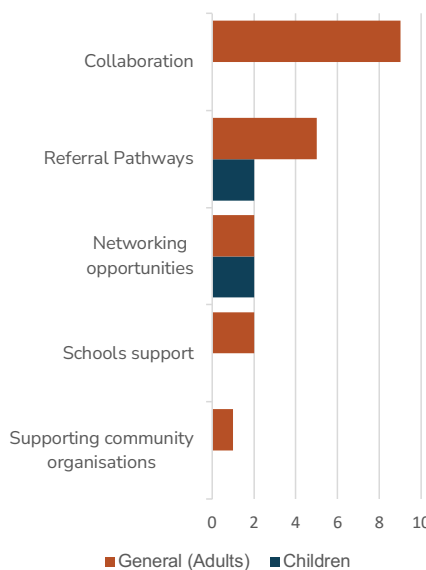
'Kindergarten Outreach Officer's funded by the Department of Education assist families to enrol into kindergarten and school Transition. This program has worked really well for families.

Attendance at Story time and pop-up play groups assist with capturing families and discussions on enrolments. Increase in enrolments by more than 50% with the Kindergarten Outreach Officer's presence at Libraries, community events, referrals from MCHN external agencies and Preschool Field Officer Program' (Service Provider).

Sub-themes in 'Council Service Delivery' (n=39)



Sub-themes in 'Partnerships' (n=23)



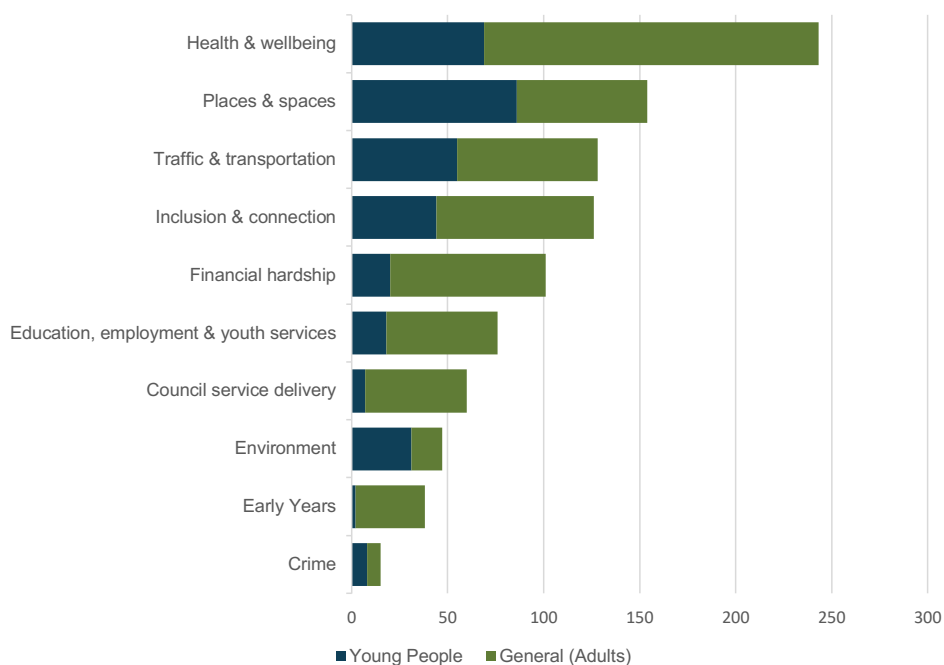
Topic 2: Issues and challenges in Merri-Bek

This topic was explored with young people, adults and the general community – with the question asked in similar variations. Young children (early years) were not asked this question in their activities.

In total, 988 comments were analysed for this question. This included 340 responses to a simplified question, and 648 responses to the more complex question. The graph below shows the key themes from these responses, broken down to show the number of comments from the question targeted at children, and adults respectively.

Although this question was about issues and challenges, many participants automatically talked about solutions to existing problems. Where possible, these responses have been assigned to themes and sub-themes and interpreted to outline the challenge or issues underlying participant solutions. Solutions and advice to Merri-bek are outlined in Topic 3.

Key themes from ALL responses: Challenges Question (n=988)

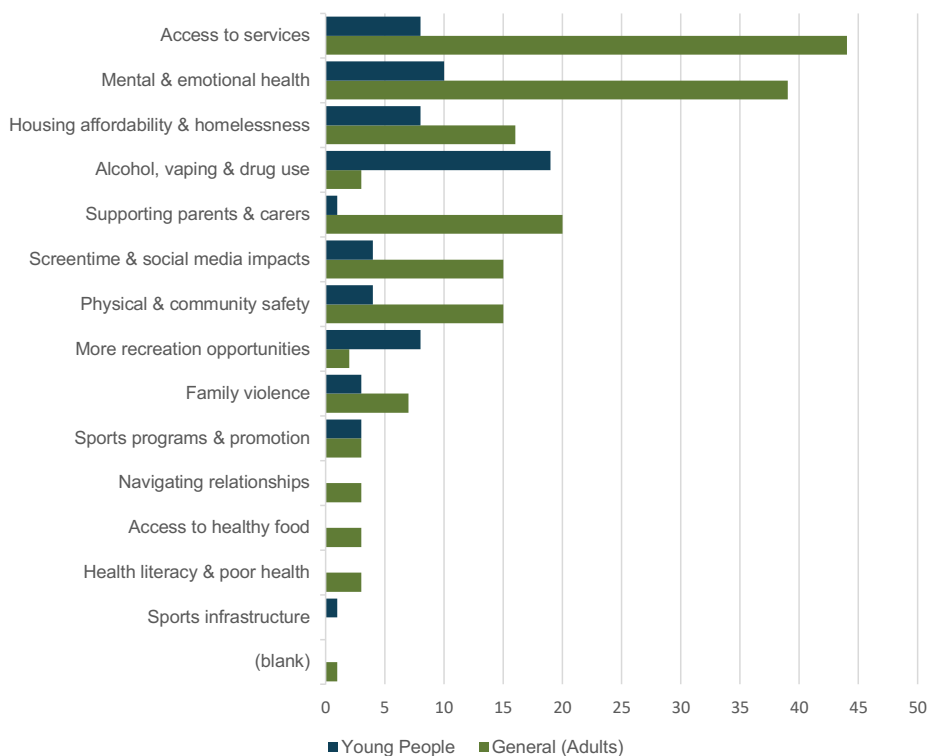


Theme 1: Health & wellbeing

In terms of issues and challenges for children, young people and families in Merri-bek, the dominant theme was that of 'health & wellbeing'. **Comments relating to this theme were 24.6% of the collected feedback for this question.** Nearly two thirds of responses were to the general question, with 174 responses. The question asked to young people had 69 responses. Responses from these two questions reflect the different priorities within the wide range of areas covered in this theme. The key sub-themes explored below.

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Sub-themes in 'Health & Wellbeing' (n=243)



‘Access to services’ was the most common sub-theme, particularly for adults, making up 21.4% of the theme.

We heard concerns about wait-lists, knowing how to connect to the right services, the costs of services, the quality of services available, and accessibility for people with special needs.

‘Young children in Early Years and Primary school cannot access allied health, paediatricians, waitlists continue to be really long’ (Service Provider).

‘Overall health and access to health services’ (13-16yr old, Glenroy College).

‘Mental & emotional health’ followed closely, making up 20.2% of comments in this theme.

Comments from parents and families talked about isolation, the need for connection, support for managing the stress of parenting, finances, workloads and time management.

‘Cost of living; community connection, loneliness; transphobia growing in society’ (35-44yr old, Rainbow Storytime).

‘Cost of living, work. Childcare/life balance. Raising children to be tolerant, kind and open minded in a society that doesn’t always promote that’ (35-44yr old woman, Coburg).

Other adults and groups in the community raised issues such as access to, and knowledge of, mental health services – particularly to support early intervention.

'Prevent escalation of mental health issues, early intervention would help' (School Principals workshop).

'Access to early allied health services. Merri-bek early childhood services to be more proactive in working with families to identify social and emotional and developmental issues with children. We are finding some children starting school have developmental issues which if identified earlier could be better supported' (Service Provider).

'Mental health - pressure of balancing school and social life. Also, this topic is not discussed at school or support' (Glenroy Library Pop-up).

Comments about **'Supporting parents & carers'** were closely link to this, making up another 8.6% of responses. Commonly we heard about a lack of support for new parents, parents from vulnerable communities, and parents struggling with work/life balance.

'Young mums' groups: an increase in young mums but they don't want to attend parenting groups, find them intimidating' (Council staff).

'Behaviour of children. Support for parents with children with behaviour needs, children with additional needs' (Coburg Connectors Event).

Some parents and community members talked about the impact of news and global events – such as climate change, wars and politics.

Making up 9.9% of comments was the sub-theme of **'Housing affordability & homelessness'**.

Access to affordable housing options, particularly to support vulnerable communities was raised frequently.

'Employment, mental health, queer acceptance/support, housing crisis, teen homelessness' (16-18yr old, Queer Collective).

'Access to housing for those in need, at affordable rates' (Brunswick Library Pop-up).

Young people talked more broadly about support for those experiencing homelessness.

'I feel sad when seeing homeless people' (9-12yr old, Children's Forum).

9.1% of the comments related to **'Alcohol, vaping & drug use'**. Young people talked more frequently about this sub-theme – primarily about vaping and the impacts of alcohol-affected people on safety.

'Drug usage in marginalised youth groups' (Young People Drop-in).

'There [are] too many drunk people walking around the street' (9-12yr old, Children's Forum).

Safety-related comments were also grouped in the **'Physical & community safety'** sub-theme, which made up 7.8% of comments. The fear of harm from traffic or road use, and crime or other unsocial behaviour (particularly at night), were all raised.

'Rising youth crime, risky behaviour, hooning making parents worried and not letting me go out with friends' (Under 18, outreach event, Glenroy).

'As a local resident, my biggest hope is that this strategy will prioritise making our streets safer for children and enhancing our public play spaces. I often worry about the traffic when walking or cycling with my family' (35-44yr old man, Hadfield).

The challenges of getting out for active recreation and socialising were talked about by young people more than adults. **'More recreation opportunities'** made up 4.1% of the theme. Comments included:

'Not enough accessible things for disabled kids' (12-17yr old, Children's Reference Group).

'More fun things' (9-12yr old, Children's Forum).

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'We need a lot more than just skate parks and basketball courts for our young teens. Leisure centres are getting too expensive. We need to engage our young teens in the community, get them into working bee or community clean up drives, tree planting/nature preservation initiatives, pick up skills at local businesses, bike shops, garages, churches.'

'We need to pave the way for our next generation through a range of engaging programs and spaces that they can access' (35-44yr old woman, Pascoe Vale, Conversations website)

The sub-theme **'Amenity'** made up 33.1% of comments about places and spaces. Most of these comments come from the simplified questions directed to young people.

The sub-theme largely related to places and spaces in Merri-bek feeling, safe, clean and comfortable to enjoy.

'Too much graffiti. Smoking and vaping. Dirty public toilets and other public spaces. Unsafe playgrounds. Litter/unsafe rubbish. Things like cigarettes and vapes and beer bottles, glass, bits of metal, in community places such as playgrounds, parks and car parks' (12-17yr old, Children's Reference Group).

Theme 2: Places & spaces

In total, 15.6% of comments (154 comments) talked about issues and challenges with local places and spaces.

This was broken up into eight sub-themes.

The second-most common sub-theme was **'Parks & greenery'** (20.8%). Both young people and adults talked about:

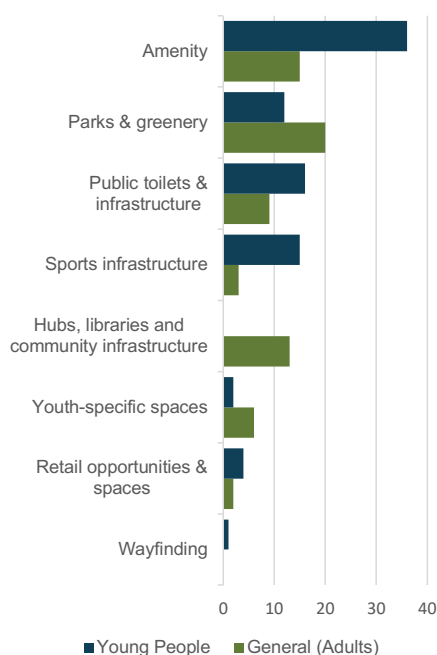
- Upgrading old infrastructure to improve safety of parks and playgrounds.
- Increasing the amount of open space, parks and playgrounds, and improving access to them.
- Providing different activities and parks and playground opportunities for varied ages and abilities – particularly providing spaces for very young children (0-3yrs), and older children.

'[There are] limited inclusive (all abilities) and fenced (safe) children's playgrounds' (LGBTQIA+ Family Pop-up).

Building on conversations about amenity and infrastructure, the third sub-theme was **'Public toilets & infrastructure'**, with 16.2% of responses.

Many comments from children and young people related to public toilet cleanliness, and the number of public toilets available. Drinking taps or fountains also made a mention.

Sub-themes in 'Places & Spaces' (n=154)



Parents and general community also mentioned the issues of drinking taps and toilets. Additional issues were a lack of nappy change facilities in playgrounds for young children. The ongoing challenge of Melbourne winters and summers meant parents were also seeking more shade and shelters at playgrounds.

'Clean public toilets with nappy change facilities. Pram accessibility around Merri-Bek, lack of ramps' (25-34yr old woman, Uniting Church Playgroup).

Conversations about infrastructure were not limited to public toilets, taps and shading. Comments about **'Sports infrastructure'** (11.7%) and **'Hubs, libraries and community infrastructure'** (8.4%), made up one-fifth (20.1%) of responses.

'Sports infrastructure' responses focused on the lack of sports facilities or the need for upgrades to existing facilities.

'More accessible sport equipment. Activity where schools can participate because some strict schools can't so maybe like a girls only or like whatever match the schools needs' (12-17yr old, Multicultural Workshop).

For **'Hubs, libraries and community infrastructure'**, responses were a little broader.

'[We need] Multiuse multi-generational spaces' (Coburg Farmers Market Pop-up).

'[We] need more spaces to meet (playgrounds, libraries, meet-ups)' (LBGTQIA+ Families Meet-up).

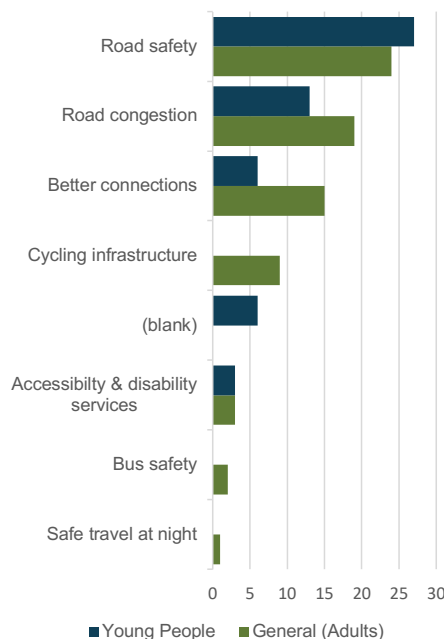
In total, 5.2% of comments were about **'youth-specific spaces'**, focused mainly on the issue of demand for these spaces and programs.

'Need for youth centres/hubs' (14-19yr old, Fawkner Futures).

Theme 3: Traffic & transportation

There were 128 comments relating to issues of traffic and transportation, representing 13% of comments on this topic.

Sub-themes in 'Traffic & Transportation' (n=128)



Comments on **'Road safety'** (39.8%) reflected concerns about dangerous driving behaviours, pedestrian safety – particularly crossing the street, and traffic issues and safety around schools.

'Cars! Especially in Coburg; not enough safe crossings' (35-44yr old woman, Coburg, Kindergarten outreach).

A further 25% of comments related specifically to **'Road congestion'**. This had implications for access to activities and programs, parking and pedestrian safety.

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'There are lots of big intersections that make me feel unsafe' (5-11yr old, Brunswick West, Multicultural Workshop).

'Better connections' (16.4% of comments) built on this, with young people and adults making the point that programs and services are only effective if the community that needs them can access them easily.

'[There is a] need for equitable access across all areas of the municipality' (LGBTQIA+ Family Pop-up).

Tied closely to this were comments about access for people with disability.

'Accessibility & disability services' accounted for 4.7% of comments.

'We don't have wheelchair ramps at school' (9-12yr old, Children's Forum).

'Cycling infrastructure' made up 7% of comments, with participants raising the issues of bike cyclist safety and inadequate bike paths.

'Road and bike safety education' (Coburg Farmers Market Pop-up).

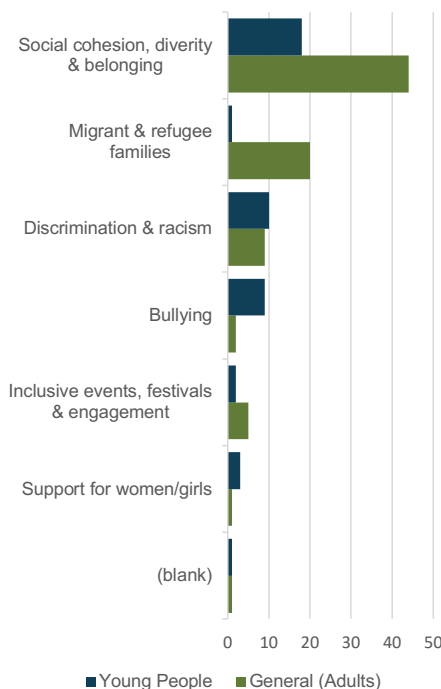
Theme 4: Inclusion & connection

We received 126 comments (12.8% of comments in this topic) that talked about issues of inclusion and connection.

'Social cohesion, diversity & belonging' was an important sub-theme, making nearly half (49.2%) of comments. More than two-thirds of these comments came from adults or the general community.

The sub-theme related to issues of isolation, a lack of neighbourly behaviour and community building, gender identity issues, and the challenges of integration rather than assimilation.

Sub-themes in 'Inclusion & Connection' (n=126)



'Heteronormative narrative is running through lots of kids' activities like colouring, books, etc. would be good to have a diverse representation of different families' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

'Asylum seekers and refugees struggle with a sense of belonging and dignity within the community' (Service Provider).

'Lack of "village" of support' (Uniting Church Playgroup).

Participants talked specifically about the challenges for **'Migrant & refugee families'** in 16.7% of comments. Comments highlighted the barriers to accessing services such as language or cultural differences, or program availability based on visa status.

'I am an immigrant and I know lots of families like me... they are keen to engage your support and services'

because of their language and cultural barriers. I know you are working on this, but I think it is still a challenge for them' (45-54yr old woman, Coburg, Growing Together Conference).

'Discrimination & racism' made up 15.1% of this theme. These themes were raised by members of the LGBTQIA+ and CALD communities. **'Bullying'** closely followed this sub-theme with 8.7% of comments.

'Bullying at school for older child, and my younger daughter faced some racist comments about her lunch from home. [Now she] wants packaged food' (25-34r old woman, Outreach Event, Glenroy).

'Support for women/girls' was specifically mentioned in 3.2% of comments – largely on the need to increase access to health and fitness activities.

'...continue to address access to sports for girls and culturally diverse girls. Continue 'beyond the ball' program given its success and uptake' (Service Providers).

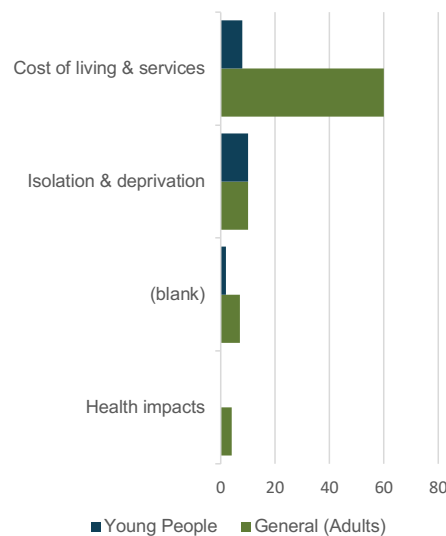
Theme 5: Financial hardship

One in every 10 comments (10.1%) talked about financial challenges.

'Cost of living & services' was by far the most common issue raised in this theme, making up two-thirds of the data (67.3%). Issues included inflation, rising household expenses, rental and mortgage costs, coupled with the costs of children's activities and services.

'Everything costs more and having to do strict budgeting/not able to send kids to extracurricular activities or school camps. This is very hard for me as father' (45-54yr old man, Outreach Event Glenroy).

Sub-themes in 'Financial Hardship' (n=101)



'Isolation & deprivation' (19.8% of comments), talked about the impacts of financial constraints – with families cutting down on social and extracurricular activities to focus on paying for the essentials.

'High rent in Fawkner means that there is no money for children's activities, as we need to pay bills and food first' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

The **'Health impacts'** comments (4%) mentioned access to nutrition but primarily talked about the mental and emotional impacts – the added stresses and the increased risk of family violence.

'Shame/stigma of financial issues' (Brunswick Baths Pop-up).

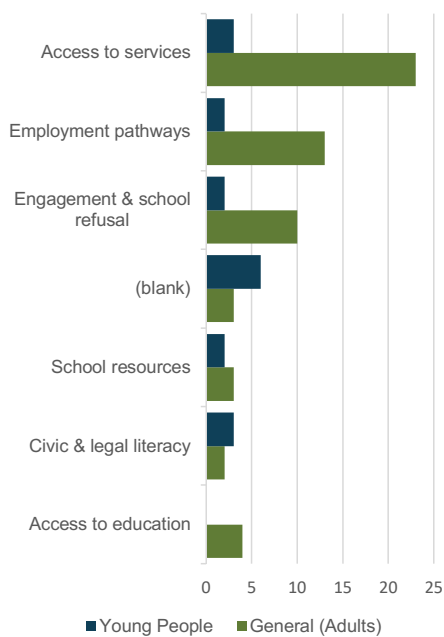
'Family violence, isolation, disconnection, financial pressures, fatigue' (35-44yr old woman, Uniting Church Playgroup).

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Theme 6: Education, employment & youth services

In total, 76 comments (7.7% of this topic) were received that related to schools, training and programs for school-aged children.

Sub-themes in 'Education, employment & youth services' (n=76)



'Access to services' was the most common sub-theme. This issue was talked about 34.2% of the time. Services included things like sports and holiday programs for school-age children, local youth clubs, or programs that cater for young people who are legally 18 but have special needs.

'Transition programs needed especially for children with disabilities' (School Principals workshop).

'Fawkner [has] not enough programs for kids 9-15yrs' (Coburg Farmers Market Pop-up).

'Employment pathways' came next, reflecting 19.7% of comments – pointing to concerns about entering the workforce.

'Skill building workshops needed for school leavers (resume building/ career counsellors/ barista license/ white card/ safe food handling/ Working with Children Check)' (12-24yr old, Youth Ambassador).

'Civic & legal literacy' (6.6%) was related to this, with comments about work rights, and educating young people on legal rights and responsibilities.

'Engagement & school refusal' had 15.8% of comments. School Principals were particularly concerned with attendance, and connection between parents, student and the education system.

'Parental expectations and understandings of role of schools. Expectations regarding discipline and learning' (School Principals workshop).

'Over the past seven years, the disengaged young people we've supported have highlighted systemic barriers within the education system that fail to accommodate diverse learning styles and individual needs, often leading to disengagement. Many come from migrant families with limited social networks, resulting in social isolation and a lack of trusted adults beyond their immediate family...' (Service Provider).

With 'School resources' (6.6%) and 'Access to education' (5.3%) we heard that some of the barriers to children learning is resources at the schools, as well as the availability of schools in each area.

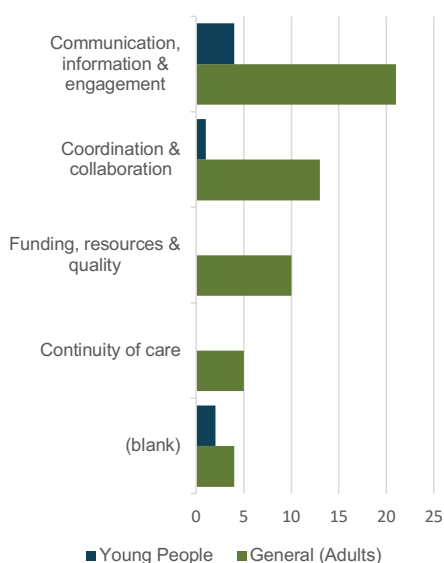
'Very high levels of neurodivergence. School systems not structured to support these YP (young people), teachers experiencing burnout' (Council staff).

Theme 7: Council service delivery

Comments about service delivery by Merri-bek City Council made up 6.2% of the responses to this topic.

Within these 60 comments, Council staff, the general community, Service Providers and Principals were the most likely to respond to this question – representing 88.3% of response.

Sub-themes in 'Council Service Delivery' (n=60)



'Communication, information & engagement' was the most common sub-theme with 41.7% of all responses. These comments related to shortfalls in knowledge sharing, about services and supports, information about raising children and health, and about hearing from the children and the community.

'There are great services, but communities don't know how to use them. For example, applying for grants is so complicated and there is no help/support for people to be helped by

the same language they speak' (Community Connectors).

'Coordination & collaboration' made up 23.2% of responses – particularly the ongoing challenge of ensuring that referral pathways, partnerships, and collaboration with services remain strong and effective.

'Knowing what else is offered: connected to other organisations and services. Connected to communities to support children and families' (School Principals workshop).

'Continuity of care' (8.3%) related closely to the idea of coordination and collaboration, talking about the issue/challenge of community member falling between the gaps in services.

'Childcare services/kindergarten extra support not continuing into school' (School Principals workshop).

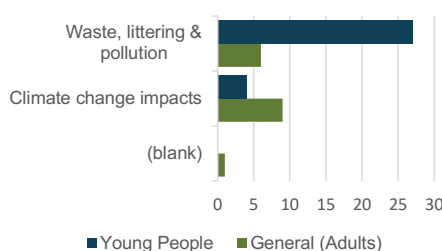
'I am too young for Oxygen and too old for other programs/activities' (Glenroy Library Pop-up).

'Funding, resources & quality' (16.7%) was primarily a concern of Council staff and related to ongoing certainty of funding, and costs of maintaining good facilities for programs.

Theme 8: Environment

In total there were 47 comments about the environment, representing 4.8% of responses.

Sub-themes in 'Environment' (n=47)



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Comments commonly talked about the local issues of **'waste, litter and pollution'** (70.2%) and its impact on enjoyment of parks and greenspace in Merri-bek.

'Pollution and rubbish falling into the creek' (Basketball event survey).

Other participants focused more on the larger picture of **'climate change impacts'** (27.7%).

'Heat, air quality, local liveability issues (green spaces, parks) are important as climate change impacts increase' (Service Provider).

'No peri-natal mental health services in Merri-bek, no support for new mums who are unwell, more mother/baby Unit beds, currently refer to NW Mental Health although this is an acute service, mental health funding has changed' (Council staff).

'Support from MCH nurses' immunisation team and support for enrolling into kinder/school' (Community Connectors).

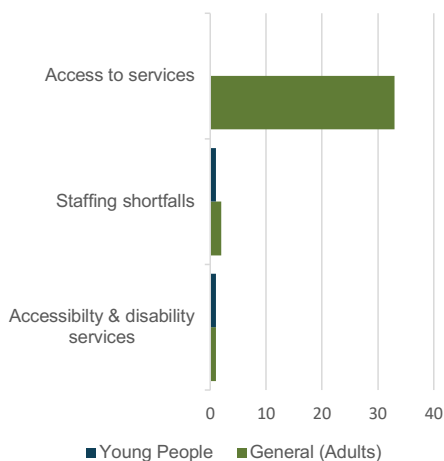
'Not enough community-based non-profit children's centres. Too many for-profit centres' (Service Provider).

Also on access, some comments talked specifically about a lack of **'accessibility & disability services'** (5.3%). Other comments (7.9%) talked about staffing for these services, particularly **'staffing shortfalls'**.

Theme 9: Early years

We received 38 comments (3.8% of all comments) about early years, primarily focused on issues of access.

Sub-themes in 'Early years' (n=38)



'Access to services' made up 86.8% of comments. These comments related to issues with supply of affordable services and availability of services such as kindergarten, playgroups, maternal child health services.

Theme 10: Crime

We received 15 comments (1.5% of all comments) about crime being an issue or challenge for young people in Merri-bek.

The quote below is an excellent example, threading together various factors, challenges and concerns facing local communities.

'Children, young people and families in the Merri-bek and Hume areas face growing challenges linked to youth violence, social disconnection and family stress.'

'[Some] young people in suburbs... experience limited access to safe recreational programs, rising living costs, and social pressures that can lead to disengagement from school and community life.' (45-54yr old woman, Conversations website).

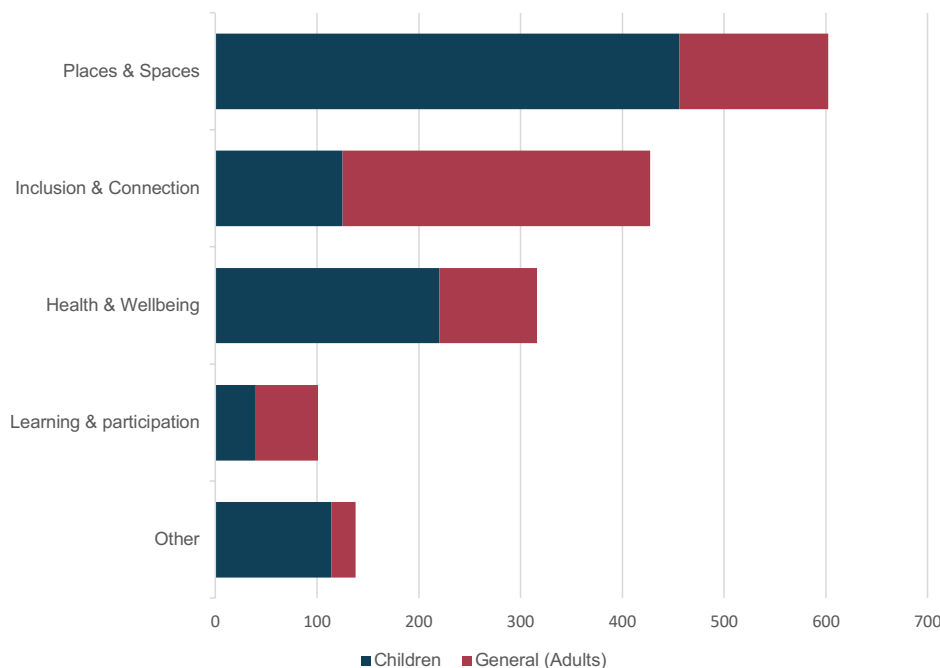
Topic 3: Solutions for Merri-Bek

This topic was explored with children, young people, adults and the general community using two broadly similar question. The simpler question, targeted at children and young people asked, 'What would make Merri-bek a better place for all children, young people and families?'. For adults and the general community, a slightly more complex question, 'What could Council do better to support the needs of children, young people and families?'.

In total, 1,584 comments were analysed for this question. This included 954 responses to the simplified question, and 630 responses to the more complex question.

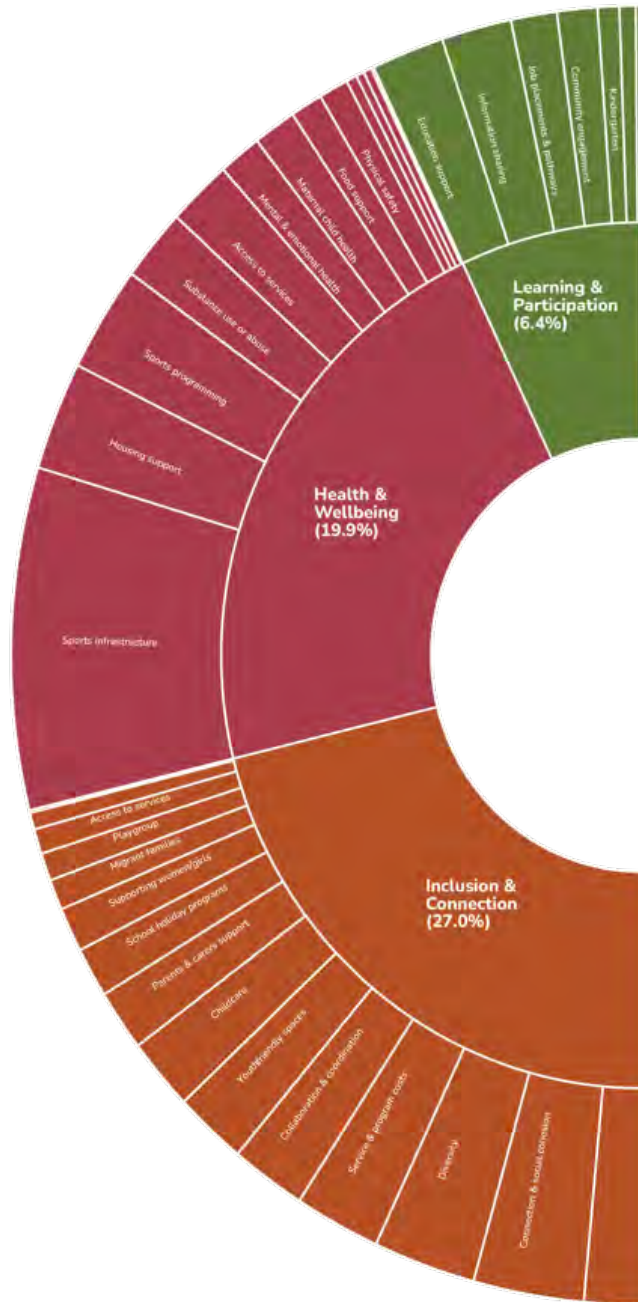
The graph below shows the key themes from these responses, broken down to show the number of comments from the question targeted at children, and adults respectively.

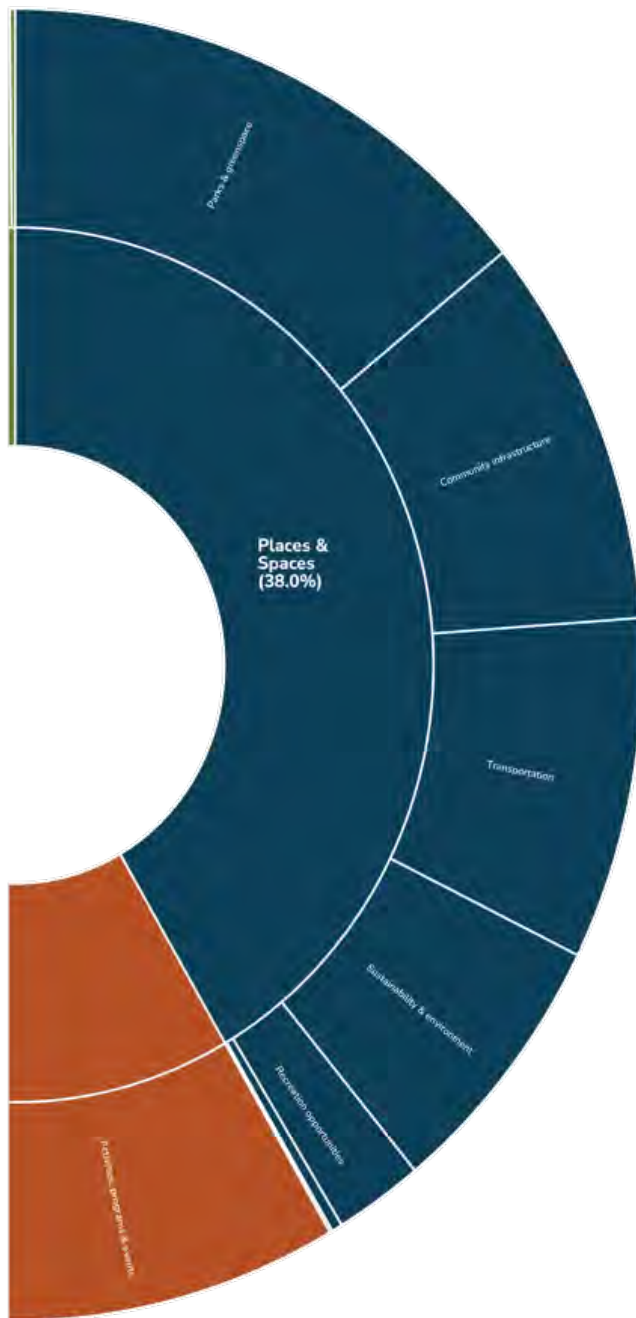
Key themes from ALL responses: Solutions Question (n=1,584)



The following two pages show a type of pie chart, with both the themes and sub-themes shown. This chart shows visually the number and weight of the different themes and sub-themes as they relate to each-other.

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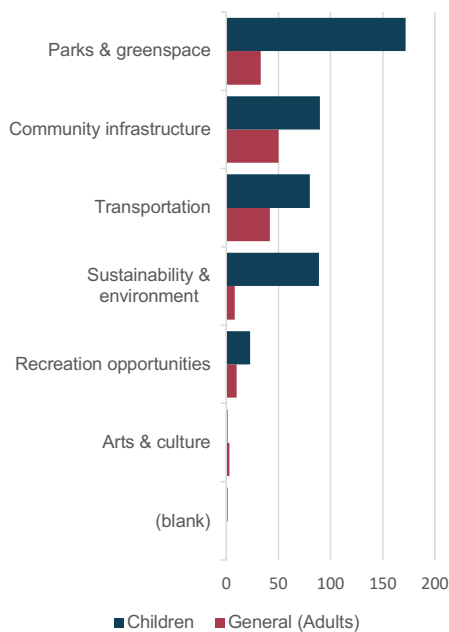


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Theme 1: Places & spaces

We received 602 comments telling us improved places and spaces would enhance the lives of children, young people and families. This represented 38% of all responses to this question. The majority of comments (75.7%) were via the children’s activities, answering the simpler version of the question.

Sub-themes in 'Places & spaces' (n=602)



205 comments (34.1%) related to **'Parks & greenspace'**, where participants talked about increasing or improving parkland, open space, children’s parks and playgrounds, and the natural areas of Merri-bek such as **Merri Creek**.

Participants told us they wanted more. More parks, more trees, more playgrounds, more diversity in the offering at different parks and playgrounds: catering for different ages and abilities.

'The biggest playgrounds ever' (0-4yr old, Coburg, Early Years service).

'More parks with good shade, wooden equipment not metal. Playgrounds that suit all ages. More baby change facilities. More support for neurodivergent children' (35-44yr old man, Coburg North, Uniting Church Playgroup).

'Add more green trees and more nature, also more parks...' (5-11yr old, Glenroy, Primary Schools activity).

'Community infrastructure' was a broad sub-theme, talking about the different elements that are needed in Merri-bek. This included 140 comments, or 23.3% of the response to this theme. In summary, changes to community infrastructure included:

- more (and cleaner) public toilets
- more baby change facilities
- more drink taps
- more rubbish bins
- better lighting in streets and parks
- better shade and shelter at parks
- improved play equipment
- greening footpaths
- more 'Street libraries'
- more Art galleries and cultural spaces
- more museums
- better disability-friendly facilities (ramps)
- hoops for bicycle parking
- more community gardens
- more community hubs
- increased operating hours for libraries
- improved early years facilities, and
- flexible and affordable community venues/spaces.

'More diverse hubs – forward planning – where there are many young families. Parks need to adapt to older teens' (Service Provider).



Image: Young people drawing at community engagement event.

'Overall, the group really wanted to see more spaces particularly outdoor spaces for recreation with adequate shade, more free social activities with sport and dance the main suggestions' (Glenroy College event).

'Transportation' included 122 comments, or 20.3% of the responses in this theme.

While much of the feedback falls outside of the scope of the strategy, the point remains that community want to be able to get around Merri-bek in accessible, affordable and stress-free ways. This may become an advocacy opportunity for Merri-bek City Council.

'Transport accessibility to events to be made more readily available' (Service Provider).

'Sustainability & environment' grouped 97 comments, or 16.1% of the responses, in this theme. A clean or cleaner environment was the primary message in these comments. Many focused on tidying up local areas, while others focused on environmental sustainability and climate change impacts.

'Having kind people and no littering' (Basketball event survey).

'Education on sustainability, water literacy and the cost of things' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

'Empowering young people to take action on Climate' (Coburg Farmers Market Pop-up).

'Recreation opportunities' made up 33 comments, 5.5% of responses in this theme. This sub-theme built on the intersections of parks, transportation and infrastructure – particularly opportunities for active recreation in Merri-bek.

Participants suggested more opportunities to spend time outside, walk, ride or skate. This was for fun, to connect with family and others, and to stay healthy.

'Safe and fun outside areas' (12-17yr old, Fawkner Futures)

'More places to ride and skate. And be safe' (5-11yr old, Multicultural Workshop).

'Arts & culture' was the least common sub-theme, with 0.7% of responses (4 comments). Arts and craft spaces and programs, creative spaces and murals were the key points.

'Making artwork - free holiday program' (Basketball event survey).

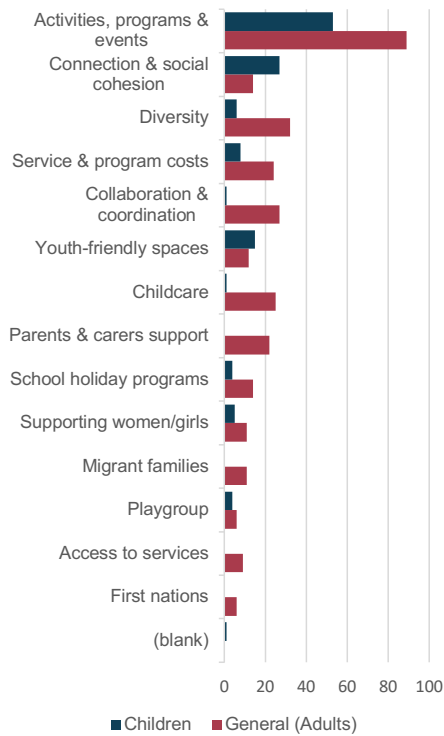
Theme 2: Inclusion & connection

There were 427 comments that talked about becoming a more tolerant, diverse and cohesive community. This made up 27% of all responses to this question.

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More than two-thirds of comments were answering the more complex question designed for adults and the general public.

Sub-themes in 'Inclusion & connection' (n=427)



'Activities, programs and events' was a large proportion, with 142 comments or 33.3% of the responses in this theme. This grouping included a range of suggestions for programming to support children, young people and families. Suggestions included:

- Health & wellbeing programs
- Cooking programs
- Movies & games nights
- Meet & greets
- Family events
- Festivals
- Carnivals
- Events at skateparks
- Night markets

- Kids clubs
- Smaller local events
- Free social activities
- Programs for middle years children
- Mentoring & life skills programs
- Primary/Secondary school transition programs
- Cultural events and festivals
- Parenting support programs
- Intergenerational programs
- School support programs
- LGBTQIA+ events
- Language learning programs
- Rhymetime/toddler sessions
- Free or cheap events for young people
- Programs for children with sensory issues
- Youth crime prevention programs
- Programs and events about inclusivity (tackling racism, sexism, queer identities and diversity)

'Continue creating opportunities for community members to connect with others who may be facing similar challenges in silence.'

The need for extra and accessible **'School holiday programs'** was highlighted in 18 comments (4.2% of responses).

'Free school holiday program would be particularly helpful for families who might work whilst their children are at primary school. The cost of using the program is very prohibitive' ((Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Briefing).

Additionally, **'Parents & carers support'** made up 5.2% of the responses (22 comments). Education on parenting, mental and emotional health support, connection, and networking were all features of these conversations.

'Forums in schools on parenting (e.g. on-line safety – parents are not empowered and don't want to upset children), offer a road-map on parenting. Address the stigma that parents might feel and focus on prevention approach'

to avoid stigma. Hosting at the school and online as a good option' (School Principals workshop)

'Parenting education programs like Circle of Security' (Brunswick Library Pop-up).

'Connection & social cohesion' was the second-most common sub-theme, with 41 comments (9.6% of responses in this theme). Participants talked about building a sense of community and belonging – to tackle isolation, unsociable and discriminatory behaviour.

'Better ways to connect with others' (12-17yr old, Queer Collective).

'[Tackling] racism' (Basketball event survey).

'Diversity' followed, with 38 comments (8.9%). Participants talked specifically in these comments about inclusion, queer identities, multicultural communities and people living with disability.

'Privileging youth voices from the asylum seeker community and offering leadership programs for young people seeking asylum. Access can be an issue though as other priorities and home commitments often take priority to 'extracurricular' activities' (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Briefing).

'We need more education on LGBTQIA+ Lots of kids think it's a joke- its not!' (5-11yr old, Children's Forum).

'Special needs: Hire professionals to help design a program to be accessible and inclusive; Also, co-design programs with special needs kids and their parents' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

Building on comments about diversity, **'Supporting women/girls'** was specifically talked about in 16 comments (3.7% of responses). These related to connection, access to sports opportunities, tackling gender-discrimination and toxic masculinity, and safe spaces for women and girls such as women only fitness areas or clubs.

'Look at opportunities particularly for multicultural girls Looking at ways to engage boys in conversations around gender equality and healthy masculinities' (Service Provider).

'Make community sport safer (for girls and gender diverse young people), more accessible, financially affordable – reduces screen time, improves mental health etc.' (Council staff).

'More girls in sport' (Basketball event survey).

Building further on comments about diversity, **'Migrant families'** were another important group mentioned in 2.6% of responses (11 comments). These comments talked about addressing the additional and specific barriers that these families experience in accessing services or connecting with community.

'Further breakdown the CALD - this banner is too vague and does not accurately 'see' or support each person and YP with their specific cultural or identity needs' (Service Provider)

'Offer culturally safe parenting and early years programs, co-designed with CALD and Aboriginal communities. Continue promoting inclusive communication, translation services, and representation in Council planning and events' (Service Provider).

'Service & program costs' included 32 comments (7.5%) focused on community need for free or subsidised programs, event and services – to provide for greater access and inclusion of vulnerable communities.

'More affordable health services - GP and dental for young people including young people with children who are on Centrelink incomes, experiencing entrenched poverty and disadvantage' (Service Provider).

'Council could best support children, young people, and families in Merri-bek by increasing access to affordable, quality childcare and early education, providing programs that support mental

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health and wellbeing, offering opportunities for social inclusion, and ensuring services are inclusive and accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse communities' (Service Provider).

There were also 6 comments (1.4%) that talked specifically about **'First Nations'**. Comments focused on celebrating First Nations culture and knowledge.

'Local early childhood services could provide an acknowledgement of Country with the children every day, embed First Nations culture all year round, not just for a single day or event, culturally safe curriculum' (First Nations Advisory Briefing).

'Collaboration & coordination' made up 6.6% of comments (28 responses). This sub-theme focused on how Council works with others, plans and funds our partnerships and services.

'Co-ordination of like-minded programs. Compliment and work together to meet needs of different people' (Service Provider).

'I hate to say money, but I think targeted funding for overarching support for children and young people. I think programs that support educators and other services to be more inclusive of First Nations perspectives without burdening that community' (Service Provider).

'Youth-friendly spaces' included 27 comments (6.3% of responses in this theme). Comments talked to the need to third-spaces or places where young people can feel safe to connect, relax or seek support.

'Extending drop-in places to provide safe space especially for young people, and to allow for access to supports when people 'want/ need' (Service Provider).

'More creative outlets for youth (e.g. jam room at oxygen)' (12-24yr old, Youth Ambassadors).

'Childcare' was mentioned in 26 comments (6.1% of responses). Comments largely focused on providing more childcare options, at affordable rates.

'Due to...development in these areas they have attracted a huge rate of couples and young families, but families [are] at the mercy of private long day care facilities which continue to raise their exorbitant fees.'

'I'd like to see the family strategy engage more with the planning strategy to be ahead of these growth challenges, rather than behind' (35-44yr old woman, Pascoe Vale South, Conversations website).

'Playgroup' made up 2.3% of response in this theme (10 comments). Like the discussion about childcare, participants want to see more available playgroup options.

'Focus(ed) playgroups for families to catch up on kids development/social skills for families in/post domestic violence situation' (Parent, Welcome Baby to Country event).

'Access to services' was mentioned in 9 comments (2.1% of comments). Participants talked about a focus on equitable access and reduction in waitlists.

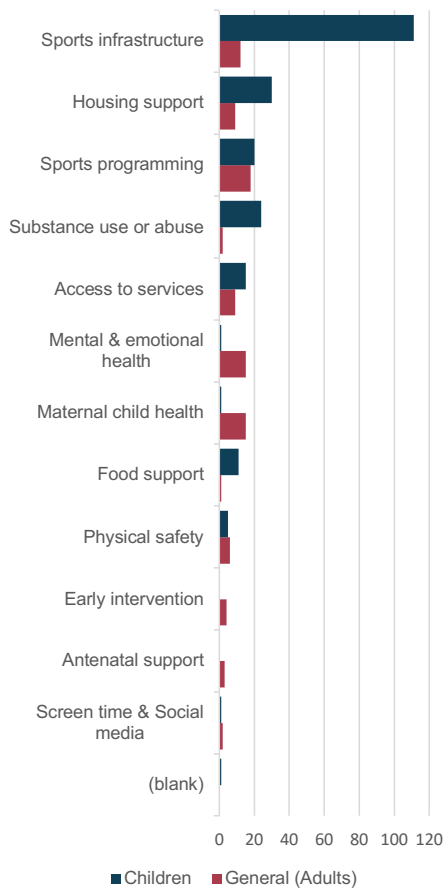
'Ensure all suburbs receive equitable service' (LGBTQIA+ Families Pop-up)

'Cut short the waiting lists in Allied health services, so the families can get access ASAP?' (Service Provider).

Theme 3: Health & wellbeing

There were 316 comments that talked about improving physical, mental and emotional health outcomes. This made up 19.9% of all responses to this question. More than two-thirds of comments were answering the simpler question designed for children and young people.

Sub-themes in 'Health & wellbeing' (n=316)



'Sports infrastructure' was the dominant sub-theme, making up 38.9% of responses (123 comments) in this theme.

This sub-theme was almost entirely populated by comments from children and young people. Responses included many comments focused on pools, basketball courts and stadiums.

'Improve sports like soccer, footy, basketball and more getting new balls' (5-11yr old, Community Vision activity).

'More sport facilities for teens for group kinds of sport are needed' (Community Connectors event).

'Sports programming' was closely related and made up an additional 12% of comments (38 comments). These comments were more about the offering at sport facilities, rather than the need for more facilities or equipment. Ideas included:

- Boxing classes
- Martial arts gyms
- More fitness programs
- Sports events and tournaments
- Camps for basketball
- More teams
- Dancing
- All abilities programs
- Swimming lessons
- Playgroups where parents can exercise
- More junior soccer

'Housing support' and **'food support'** made up 12.3% (39 comments) and 3.8% (12 comments) of responses respectively. While both sub-themes related to cost of living, housing support was more focused on the risks of homelessness and food support more focused on food security and healthy eating habits.

'More effort into giving homeless people homes and jobs' (5-11yr old, Coburg, Community Vision activity).

'Affordable housing for those in need, at affordable rates' (Brunswick Library Pop-up).

'Substance use and abuse' made up 8.2% (26 comments) of this theme. Comments largely focused on reducing the impacts of vaping, cigarettes, and alcohol.

'Less illegal substance use' (Young person, Youth Drop-in program).

Some comments talked about providing more support for substance abuse.

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'Mental health awareness groups as well as drug and alcohol support groups' (12-24yr old, Youth Ambassadors).

'Access to services' was discussed in 7.6% of responses (24 comments) to this theme. Participants mainly talked about the need to improve access to health care (like hospitals and GPs).

'As a parent of a neurodivergent child with autism and ADHD who attends primary school, and as someone who wasn't born in Australia, I've found it quite difficult to understand and access the systems that support children and families.'

I'd like to see the Council's strategy place stronger focus on supporting families like mine who are navigating additional barriers language, cultural differences, and complex systems around education, health, and disability' (35-44yr old man, Hadfield, Conversations website).

Building on advice about access to services, a small number of comments (4, 1.3%) talked about the importance of **'early intervention'**.

'We know that earlier support, from the earliest age, can avoid later issues in life. It's important to keep this in mind when making decisions as to where funding goes' (Service Provider).

'Mental & emotional health' represented 5.1% of responses in this theme (16 comments). Participants told us mental health needs to be affordable, accessible, appropriate in format, and culturally sensitive.

'Mental Health programs for kids' (Glenroy Library Pop-up).

'Mental health sessions in multiple languages focusing on different topics' (Community Connectors).

'Support mothers' mental health with events, workshops, conversation cafes: they should be able to bring children;

timing is important...more in the morning and in school holidays' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

Building on mental and emotional health, 3 comments (0.9%) called out **'screen time & social media'** impacts specifically.

'Physical safety' was represented in 11 comments (3.5% of responses in this theme). Comments largely talked about street lighting – which was also raised in the Community infrastructure and transportation sub-themes under 'Places & spaces).

'Better lighting at Fawkner Station/ work on the building' (12-24yr old, Youth Ambassadors).

Overlapping mental and physical health, one service provide has advice about childhood maltreatment.

'Council should formulate a local response to the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study. Unfortunately, child abuse is the single most impactful issue for children, and Merri-Bek could lead the way' (Service Provider).

'Maternal child health' made up 5.1% of responses, (16 comments). Participants advocated for more of these services, along with some specific advice.

'Outreach MCH program for families with barriers to engagement' (Council staff).

'We are an LGBTQIA+ family and have had some negative experiences with the MCH service. Having some training of MCH nurses would be great, or even a dedicated person' (35-44yr old, Fawkner Festa).

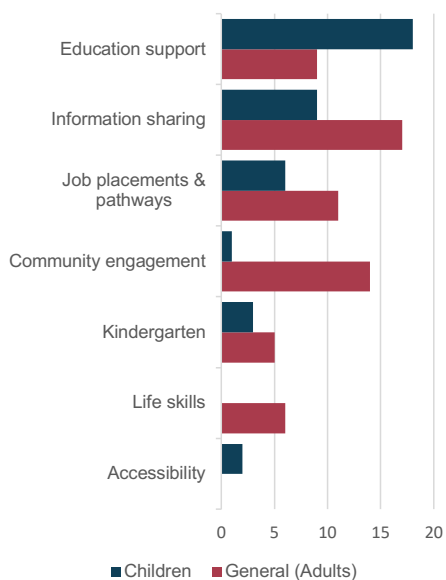
Building on this, a few comments (3, 0.9%) talked about **'antenatal support'**.

'Need to capture the antenatal period and support, include pregnancy in future Strategy' (First Nations Advisory briefing).

Theme 4: Learning & participation

There were 101 comments that talked about the importance of getting children, young people and families excited about lifelong learning, equipping students to succeed in the adult world, and getting involved. These comments made up 6.4% of all responses to this question. One-third of comments were in answer to the simpler question designed for children and young people.

Sub-themes in 'Learning & participation' (n=101)



'Education support' was discussed in 26.7% of the comments (27 responses). This sub-theme came up more often in the simple question than the general question for adults. More schools, better access to schools, and more supports within schools, were all raised.

'More support in school and in studies' (Young People Drop-in).

'Some kind of tutoring groups/services to help with school' (Brunswick Baths Pop-up).

Building on the idea of support for education, **'Accessibility'** was discussed in 3 other comments.

'Improved safety, learning and wellbeing are the big ones but also more support for kids with disabilities in public schools and just generally in the community' (12-17yr old, Coburg, Children's Reference Group).

'Information sharing' included 26 comments (25.6% of responses in this theme), and refers to communications and information activities to build knowledge of things like:

- council services and support
- the Merri-bek community
- current issues for children and young people
- sporting and social opportunities
- health literacy and healthy foods
- parenting skills
- holiday programs and daycare

'Advertise more to youth – more sponsored posts on social media/targeted posts/ student advocates/ parents' (12-24yr old, Youth Ambassadors).

'Community engagement' made up 14.9% of responses (15 comments). Participants focused on ways that Council could build stronger relationships with community and recommended a focus on young people.

'Coming into schools to talk about services' (12-17yr old, Coburg High).

'[We need] services designed and led with community - what does representation look like on steering committees / working groups?' (Service Provider).

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'Job placements & pathways' had 17 comments (16.8% of responses). This sub-theme related to employment opportunities, and providing pathways into (local) employment.

'Provide more training pathways e.g. barista course' (12-17yr old, Coburg High).

'Provide support for resume making and job interview preparation' (Glenroy Hub Pop-up).

Building on this, participants (6 comments, 5.9%) also talked about mentoring and **'Life skills'** as important to set up young people for success as adults.

'Education on life skills for young people e.g. work laws and taxes' (14-16yr old, Coburg High).

'Having more workshops on life skills like resilience, emotional strength, time management, etc.' (Community Connectors).

'Kindergarten' made up 7.9% of response in this theme (8 comments). Comments were varied, with some asking for more Council-run services, more outreach services to connect with migrant families and a bush kinder.



Image: Young people participating in the Children's Forum activity

Next steps

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this engagement process!

How this report will be used

This report will be used to share with Council and decision-makers how the engagement process went, and what we heard.

The report, and its supporting data will be used by the project team at Merri-bek to begin a draft Children, Young People & Families Strategy. Another round of engagement on the draft Strategy is currently planned in the first half of 2026.

Community feedback that falls outside of the scope of the Strategy will (where possible) be shared with relevant parts of Merri-bek City Council – to advocate for your concerns and ideas.

For further information

To keep up to date with our project, follow us via our Conversations Merri-bek website:
<https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/children-young-people-and-families-strategy>

7.5 PRESERVING MERRI-BEK'S PROUD MIGRANT HISTORY THROUGH ART AND STORY TELLING

Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy

Cultural Development

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Receives the report on preserving Merri-bek's Proud Migrant History Through Art and Story Telling.
2. Notes that the upcoming Coburg Stories historic projections will be delivered in June-July 2026 and will showcase Greek, Italian, Chinese and Lebanese migration stories alongside First Nations history.

REPORT

Executive Summary

This report responds to Council's 8 October 2025 resolution (Item 8.8) to investigate options for collecting and recording migrant stories and histories across Merri-bek, to deliver them through accessible arts and libraries programs.

Coburg Stories historic projections is an event that responds to this ambition, collecting migrant stories and sharing them through an accessible projection program, walking tour and library events. These stories will add to the body of knowledge about migrant communities in Merri-bek, and provide a celebration of our shared history and identity in Coburg. The story of migration to Merri-bek will be shared through a social media campaign during the event, and the stories, interviews and images gathered will be made available through the libraries' online local history collection.

Previous Council Decisions

Preserving Merri-bek's Proud Migrant History Through Art and Storytelling – 8 October 2025

That Council investigates options for building upon previous materials and resources to collect and record migrant stories and history across Merri-bek, including those relating to residents, people, community clubs, buildings and other places and things with a migrant connection. That Council explores how it can curate those stories through an arts program and share them through our libraries.

1. Policy Context

- Merri-bek Community Vision – supports a welcoming and proudly diverse city.
- Council Plan 2025-2029:
 - Theme 3: Beautiful and liveable city
 - Theme 4: Thriving economy and culture
- Library Services Strategy 2019
- Arts and Culture Strategy 2023–2030

2. Background

Coburg is steeped in history – migrant, industrial, retail, artistic and more. The cultural diversity of Coburg is reflected in its streets and music, restaurants and bakeries, and markets with fresh ingredients and products from around the world. Coburg is also a creative suburb with many arts studios, festivals and performance events happening across the year. Many generations of families have called Coburg home.

There is a need to proactively seek out, collect and share stories from the past in order to ensure that history is preserved for future generations. There are many collecting institutions and community groups and society's that are committed to this endeavour, and Merri-bek Libraries also maintain a vital and diverse local history collection that is accessible to all.

The connection between art, storytelling and history is a sweet spot in which local migrants' stories can be collected, highlighted and celebrated. The aim of this project is to bring wide attention to our migrant past, offer moments of celebration and joy, and to ensure that the stories are properly captured and stored for future generations to learn from. While the projection event is site specific to Coburg, it will provide a focal point for sharing about Merri-bek's migrant communities more broadly throughout the event, including at library events and through a social media campaign.

3. Issues

Telling migrant histories through art and storytelling

A special winter arts event will be the delivery of Coburg Stories, a historic projections activation with guided tours and an event happening in and around Coburg Library and Victoria Street Mall. The program will celebrate Merri-bek's diverse history and heritage by sharing the interesting stories of our community, including First Peoples, and migrant stories from Chinese, Greek, Italian and Lebanese communities.

Local history research supported by the library, local groups and Council's Community Connectors have informed the program, creating an archive of moments, locations and characters that have helped shaped the history of Coburg. The historic stories have been brought to life through writing and art, creating a series of projections to be enjoyed by community and an archive of knowledge that will be kept by the library for many years to come.

The project will be delivered in June-July 2026 and will comprise of a number of ways for people to enjoy, including:

- Nightly projections at Coburg Library and a number of nearby sites for two months, which people can explore via guided or self-guided walks. QR codes will be displayed at projection sites for people to access more detail about the stories shared, creating opportunities for surprise discovery by locals as they move around Coburg.
- Guided walks across the opening weekend, showcasing a number of historical stories and sites that celebrate the Coburg's diverse history. Each location will showcase a different story, told through images and soundscape design.
- Coburg's characters – from Bob Hawke to the Coburg Cowboy – showing on the digital screens outside Coburg Library to celebrate and educate on the many people and cultures that have made up the Coburg community over time.
- Library workshops about gathering and sharing family stories, and events including a discussion of local creatives who have been collecting and sharing family and community stories.
- A social media campaign that tells Merri-bek's diverse migrant history and how waves of migration have shaped our local lives.

The collected histories and stories, including audio and visual materials, will be archived and added to Merri-bek Libraries' online local history collection, where they can be accessed freely by the community.

Following the event, the audio visual works will be shown in the ongoing projections series at Coburg Library and Michelle Guglielmo park in Brunswick.

Community impact

A project that showcases and celebrates Merri-bek's migrant history while helping residents feel a sense of connection to where they live is designed to develop civic pride. Merri-bek has a long and proud migrant history. Sharing and celebrating migrant stories, local heroes, and First Nations culture is intended to build empathy and contribute to social cohesion, enrich local culture, and makes a contribution to shaping an inclusive historical record.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Economic sustainability implications

The program is expected to attract people to central Coburg. There is an opportunity to work with local traders to further promote the activities and local businesses.

Legal and risk considerations

Detailed risk management plans will be implemented for the events.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The project will highlight histories of several priority groups outlined in the Human Rights policy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; Migrant, refugee and faith communities; and women, girls and gender diverse communities.

4. Community consultation and engagement

The project team have engaged with a range of community groups and members to research and gather artifacts, footage, images and artifacts to tell a variety of stories from Coburg's past including Coburg Historical Society, Council's Community Connectors and local artists and residents.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

Affected persons include general community members.

Communications

A full communications plan has been developed, including to share Merri-bek's migrant history on digital platforms for the duration of the event. The projections and associated events will be promoted through Council channels with support from local partners.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. The project will be funded through existing resourcing.

7. Implementation

The project will be delivered in June-July 2026.

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.6 SUBURB BOUNDARY REALIGNMENT BRUNSWICK/BRUNSWICK EAST - 251-265 LYGON STREET AND 1A PITT STREET

Acting Director Business Transformation, Anita Curnow

Financial Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council endorses the suburb boundary realignment of Brunswick and Brunswick East to encompass the entire mixed-use development at 251-265 Lygon Street, Brunswick East and 1A Pitt Street, Brunswick into Brunswick East, as outlined in this report.

REPORT

Executive Summary

The need for a minor realignment of a suburb boundary has emerged due to mixed-use development currently under construction across multiple land parcels, attributed to Brunswick and Brunswick East. The current suburb boundary bisects the development; it is not compliant and needs to be realigned. The current and proposed suburb boundary realignment is indicated in the maps in the background and issues sections of this report.

This recommendation is independent of any current or future planning processes or decisions. The current project developer is the only property owner impacted by the proposed change and is in support of the proposal. There is no budget impact of this report.

As the naming and numbering authority Council is responsible for the maintenance of suburb boundaries. The proposed re-alignment is the most effective resolution, by encompassing the entire development into the Brunswick East suburb.

Previous Council Decisions

Suburb Boundary Realignment – 119A and 121 Lygon Street, Brunswick East - 8 February 2023

That Council approve the suburb boundary realignment to the western boundary of 121 Lygon Street, in order to ensure that the development at 119A and 121 Lygon Street, is located wholly within the suburb of Brunswick East, as outlined in this report.

This previous development was located on the corner of Lygon Street and was bisected by the Brunswick/Brunswick East boundary.

1. Policy Context

Merri-bek Council is a Naming Authority under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* (the Act) and is the first point of contact for adding or changing names for places, features and roads within the municipality.

The *Naming rules for places in Victoria 2022* (The Naming Rules), are the statutory guidelines provided for under section 5 of The Act that provide standardised naming conventions and clear naming procedures. Any naming proposal must conform to these guidelines.

Once assessed the proposal is assessed against 'The Naming Rules' including Australian Standards AS NZS 4819-2011 Rural and Urban Addressing (The Standards). If approved the proposal will be forwarded to the Registrar of Geographic Names for consideration. The relevant sections of 'The Standards' and 'The Naming Rules' are shown below.

Under 'The Naming Rules' applications should assess and address any impact to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names resolutions, Sustainable Development Goals and Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework goals, where relevant.

AS NZS 4819-2011 Rural and Urban Addressing

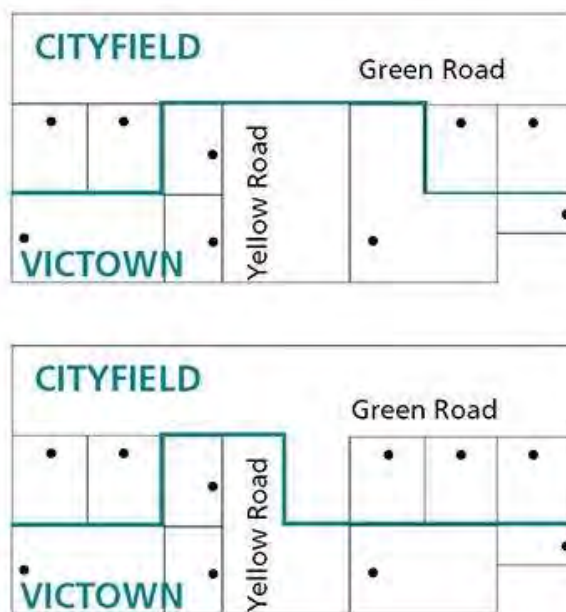
Section 3.4.2 Review of localities

Boundaries of localities in areas that are subject to development should be reviewed and amended where appropriate.

Official Naming Rules for Places in Victoria

Section 5.2.1

5. If a property is situated on a corner and the block is subdivided with one or more of the new properties accessed from a road generally being addressed to a different locality, the locality boundary should be changed to incorporate the new subdivided properties.



2. Background

In seeking to formally define suburb boundaries for the first time, the Geographic Place Name Committee in January 1997, provided proposed suburb boundaries for Council's consideration. On 19 May 1999 Council adopted these suburb boundaries.

The Brunswick/Brunswick East locality boundary sits at the rear of properties facing Lygon Street between Brunswick Road and Albion Street, encompassing Lygon Street properties in Brunswick East.

While locality boundaries are intended to be enduring, in areas subject to development, boundaries should be reviewed and amended where appropriate. This development includes the highlighted land parcels below, some attributed Brunswick East and some Pitt Street, Brunswick. This creates a bisection across the development.

This small realignment is proposed to bring the entirety of the site within Brunswick East. This change is required to comply with state naming rules, meet addressing standards, better align with strategic planning, and to prevent mapping anomalies.

Current boundary



Relevant Building Permits

- Ministerial permit: PA2403218
- Property Applications: MIN/2025/1/A - Planning permit PA2403218 - 34.01-4, Construct a building or construct or carry out works, 43.02-2, Construct a building or construct or carry out works under clause 43.02-2 of the DDO19, 52.06-3, Reduce the number of car parking spaces.
- Property Applications: PBS/2025/1155 - Construct a multi-story residential, retail and carpark development.
- Property Applications: PPE/2025/247 - Amendments to ministerial permit PA2403218-1 and documents for endorsement.
- Property Applications: SC/2025/309 - 2 Lot Subdivision.

Proposed Boundary



In accordance with Section 5.2.1 of 'The Naming Rules' it is recommended to amend the locality boundary to incorporate the properties included in this development into the Brunswick East suburb.

Council officers have assessed that this proposal meets all relevant statutory requirements including the following:

- Conforms to the statutory requirements in Section 5.2 of 'The Naming Rules'.
- Since the locality names remain unchanged, all naming conventions are being properly followed.
- The locality boundaries sit wholly within Merri-bek municipality therefore Council does not need to consult with neighbouring municipalities.
- The amendment is a small realignment, no impact has been made to United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names resolutions, Sustainable Development Goals, or Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework goals.

Once Council resolves to realign the boundary, it is submitted the Geographic Names Victoria Registrar for finalisation and gazettal whereby the Land Victoria maps are amended. After this occurs addressing can then be issued to progress the subdivision application and services connections can be arranged.

3. Issues

To issue the new address for both the subdivision application and upcoming multi-assessment apartment complex, Council is required to meet the guidelines in the Official Naming Rules for Places in Victoria and AS NZS 4819-2011 Rural and Urban Addressing. The parcel itself must sit in the named suburb.

Currently Council is unable to issue the new addresses and street numbering as the development is bisected by the boundary between Brunswick and Brunswick East. Consequently, without addressing, the development is unable to arrange services to be connected or progress their subdivision application for the release of new titles.

A realignment of the suburb boundary is required so that the entire development is encompassed into a single suburb.

Community impact

No other members of the community are affected by the suburb boundary adjustment

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Economic sustainability implications

There are no economically sustainability implications related to the report.

Legal and risk considerations

The recommendations in this report comply with the requirements of the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* and the *Naming rules for places in Victoria 2022*.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and there are no implications associated with this report.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Council's Community Engagement Policy 2024 requires community engagement when community impact is anticipated. Considering this proposed boundary realignment has a negligible impact on the community, nor can the realignment be influenced significantly by the community; the identified affected persons have been contacted directly.

A public notice was displayed on Conversations Merri-bek for 60 days and letters were sent to directly affected residents and ratepayers as well as those residents and ratepayers in properties adjacent to the proposed new boundaries. This was done in accordance with 'The Naming Rules'.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

Letters were sent to all impacted ratepayers and residents of properties adjacent to the proposed boundary change inviting submissions.

A public notice was published on the Conversations Merri-Bek Page, inviting submissions for 60 days meeting the minimum 30 days as per the Naming Guidelines. The owner of the land parcels has provided a letter of support to amend the suburb boundary and no objections were received.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no financial implications of this report. The lodgement to Geographic Names Victoria and issuing of addressing reflecting the suburb boundary change can be completed with the current resources in the Financial Services budget.

7. Implementation

Should Council support the recommendation of this report, Council officers will submit the resolution to Geographic Names Victoria Registrar for finalisation and gazettal whereby the Land Victoria maps are amended.

Once complete, the address of the impacted properties will be updated and other relevant government departments, Yarra Valley Water and Australia Post will be notified.

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.7 DRAFT RATES HARDSHIP POLICY

Acting Director Business Transformation, Anita Curnow

Financial Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the Draft Rates Hardship Policy (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purposes of community consultation.
2. Invites feedback on the Draft Rates Hardship Policy for the 10-day consultation period from Tuesday 5 May until Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 5pm.
3. Makes the Draft Rates Hardship Policy available on Conversations Merri-bek website and hard copies available on request.
4. Receives a further report back at its meeting on 10 June 2026 outlining any feedback received and presenting the final policy for consideration and adoption.

REPORT

Executive Summary

Council adopted its Hardship Policy in September 2022 (**Attachment 2**), with a scheduled review prior to July 2026. The current policy was developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and includes long-term assistance provisions designed to support individuals and businesses experiencing ongoing financial impacts from that period.

While the existing policy addresses the key findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's *Hardship – Local Councils* report (May 2021), the regulatory environment has since changed. In late 2025, the Minister for Local Government issued updated *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges*, which introduces strengthened expectations for councils in the management of financial hardship and recovery practices.

The updated draft Rates Hardship Policy has been comprehensively revised to ensure full alignment with the 2025 Ministerial Guidelines and to reflect contemporary best practice. The review has resulted in several substantial changes, including:

- The removal of all non-rates hardship provisions from this policy, with those matters to be addressed through a separate standalone policy.
- Structural and procedural changes to ensure consistency with the Ministerial Guidelines and the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- Minor administrative and operational updates to improve clarity, consistency and application.

The revised policy provides a clearer, more compliant framework for the management of rates and charges hardship, while maintaining Council's commitment to fairness, transparency and community support.

Previous Council Decisions

Hardship Policy – 14 September 2022

That Council:

1. *Adopts the revised Hardship Policy, at Attachment 1 to this report;*
2. *Writes to submitters to thank them for their submission and advise them of the outcomes of Council's decision, including as it relates to their specific submission.*

Review of Hardship Policy – 13 July 2022

That Council:

1. Endorses the Draft Hardship Policy (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purpose of community exhibition.
2. Invites feedback on the Draft Hardship Policy for the 10-day public consultation period from Tuesday 2 August until Tuesday 16 August 2022 at 5pm.
3. Makes the Draft Hardship Policy available on the Council website and hard copies available at the three customer service centres and all libraries.
4. Receives a further report at its meeting on 14 September 2022 outlining any feedback received on the Draft Hardship Policy; and presenting a final Proposed Hardship Policy for consideration for adoption.
5. Extends the application of the COVID Hardship Policy until 30 September 2022.

COVID-19 Response – Update – 13 October 2021

That Council, in response to the ongoing pandemic emergency, resolves to:

...

2. Extend the operation of the COVID-19 Hardship Policy, with amendments as attached.

...

Closures and Modifications in response to COVID-19 Emergency – 25 March 2020

That Council:

...

3. Adopts the COVID-19 Financial Hardship Policy at Attachment 1 to this report.

...

1. Policy Context

Council adopted its current Hardship Policy (The Policy) in September 2022 in response to the prolonged financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community. The Policy has been reviewed and updated to incorporate the *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges 2025* (The Ministerial Guidelines).

This report supports Council's continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-bek on behalf of its ratepayers.

2. Background

The Policy was designed to provide extended support to individuals and businesses and to address the findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's *Hardship – Local Councils* report (May 2021).

Since that time, the regulatory environment has changed. In late 2025, the Minister for Local Government released updated *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges*, which introduces strengthened expectations for councils in the management of hardship and recovery processes.

A review of the existing policy identified that it no longer fully reflects the structure, terminology and operational requirements of the 2025 Guidelines. The policy also combines rates and non-rates hardship provisions, which creates ambiguity in scope and limits procedural clarity.

The updated draft policy addresses these gaps by now solely focusing on rates and charges hardship, aligning with the Ministerial Guidelines, and separating non-rates hardship into a standalone policy. This ensures Council's framework remains compliant, contemporary and fit for purpose.

3. Issues

Response to the Ministerial Guidelines

In response to the Ministerial Guidelines issued in December 2025 the following updates have been made to the policy:

- Separates hardship (deferral) from financial hardship (waiver) in line with the Ministerial Guidelines definitions.
- Suspends interest where a payment plan, deferral or hardship arrangement is in place, with scope to waive interest where financial hardship is established.
- Requires all recovery and enforcement action to pause while a hardship or payment plan application is being assessed.
- Introduces flexible, place-based and capacity-to-pay payment plans with no fixed recovery timeframe.
- Embeds a trauma-informed approach that recognises vulnerability, including family violence, illness, disability and economic abuse.
- Prohibits automatic exclusions based on property type, land use, number of properties or residential status.
- Requires transparent written decisions, reasons for refusal and access to internal review by an independent officer.
- Sets clear assessment and review timeframes (10 business days) for hardship decisions.
- Strengthens escalation safeguards so court action and land sale are only considered after all hardship and engagement options are exhausted.

Sale of land to recover unpaid rates and charges

Council may sell land, or cause land to be transferred into Council ownership, to recover unpaid rates or charges in accordance with section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. Council may only consider the sale or transfer of land where all of the following apply:

- The amount due for rates or charges (including interest and enforcement costs) is more than three (3) years overdue.
- No current plan exists for payment of the amount (including a payment plan); and
- Council has obtained a Court order requiring payment of the amount (or part of the amount).

Each financial year, Council will receive a report in September documenting outstanding rates balances as well as officers' assessment on identifying land that may meet the legislative criteria for sale or transfer. Officers may apply additional criteria such as whether a property is a primary place of residence when assessing which properties (if any) to recommend to Councillors to commence the sale process.

To ensure transparency Council's decisions commencing the process of selling and the final outcome regarding the sale or transfer of the land will be recorded and made public having regard for information that is deemed confidential.

Minor Administration Updates

The following updates have been made to reflect the changing internal environments:

- Updates the responsible department to reflect current Council structure and reporting lines.
- Replaces outdated team names with current operational units responsible for rates and hardship management.

- Introduces clear internal timeframes for assessment, notification and review of applications.
- Formalises internal review rights by requiring decisions to be reassessed by a different delegated officer.
- Clarifies roles, responsibilities and approval pathways across executive and finance leadership.
- Strengthens internal governance by formalising monitoring, trend analysis and reporting of hardship activity.
- Aligns policy review and escalation processes with current Council governance and risk frameworks.

Community impact

The draft Policy supports the purpose of the Ministerial Guidelines which is to ensure fair, consistent, and compassionate treatment for ratepayers across all Victorian municipalities.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Economic sustainability implications

The draft Policy allows for special payment arrangements to be entered into by both commercial and residential debtors.

Legal and risk considerations

The draft Policy ensures that ratepayers are encouraged to utilise financial counselling, legal and other supports. Legal action to recover debt is seen as the last resort.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and this policy addresses the following Human Rights considerations:

- The right to privacy and reputation
- The right to protection of families and children.

4. Community consultation and engagement

A number of significant updates providing a greater level of Council support to ratepayers have been made to the draft Policy following the Ombudsman's report (May 2021) and Ministerial Guidelines (2025).

To support further feedback from members of the community, the draft Policy will be exhibited for 10 working days as required under the Council's Community Engagement Policy.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

The updated policy extends Council support to ratepayers particularly those experiencing hardship. Members of the community are encouraged to provide feedback during the 10-day community consultation period.

Communications

Once the draft Policy is endorsed for exhibition, it will be available community review and feedback via the Conversations Merri-bek page for a minimum of 10 days

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The recommendations set out in this report responds to the financial difficulties being experienced by residential and commercial rate payers across the municipality as well as the Ministerial Guidelines 2025. The recommendations proposed seek to balance the need for council to manage the rates debtor balances and impacts on council cash flow against the difficulties being experienced by residents.

The changes proposed in this report are not expected to materially impact the performance against budget or cashflow.

7. Implementation

Subject to Council's decision, the draft Policy will be advertised followed by a 10-day public exhibition period.

Following consideration of the feedback, a final draft Policy will be presented for Council consideration and with a recommendation at Council Meeting on Wednesday 10 June 2026.

Subject to endorsement of the draft Policy, the external website content will be updated to reflect the options available for Hardship Relief.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | ↓ Rates Hardship Policy - Draft Update - 2026 | D26/31343 |
| 2 | ↓ Hardship Policy - Council Resolved - 14 September 2022 | D22/453903 |



Policy ID No

Date Authorised by Chief Executive Officer or Council:

Commencement Date:

Review Date

Responsible Department

Business Transformation

<Insert Date signed here>

DRAFT

1. Introduction

This policy outlines the principles that Council officers must apply when managing rates and charges and providing support to ratepayers experiencing hardship.

2. Context

2.1 Alignment

This Rates Hardship Policy has been developed to provide a consistent, long-term framework for supporting ratepayers experiencing hardship. It incorporates ongoing assistance provisions and responds to the findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship* (May 2021) and the *Ministerial Guidelines for Councils Relating to Payment of Rates and Charges* (the Guidelines) published December 2025.

2.2 Organisational Context

Council levies rates and charges on rateable properties to fund the delivery of services and infrastructure for the community. These amounts are invoiced in advance and may be paid by the due date or through an approved payment plan.

While Council has a responsibility to ensure rates and charges are paid to support its operations, it also recognises that some ratepayers may experience financial hardship that affects their ability to meet these obligations.

In managing rates and charges, Council is required to balance the need for financial sustainability with fairness, transparency and equity. Where a ratepayer is experiencing hardship, appropriate support and relief may be provided in accordance with this Policy and the Ministerial Guidelines.

3. Objectives

To provide a transparent and fair framework for the management of rates and charges, ensuring Council's revenue is protected while supporting ratepayers who are experiencing hardship.

This Policy aims to ensure that Council manages rates and charges in a way that supports its financial sustainability, while also considering the individual circumstances of ratepayers and the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1989*, the *Local Government Act 2020* and Ministerial Guidelines.

The policy is guided by the following principles:

- Flexible, place-based payment options that respond to local community needs and hardship circumstances.
- Clear, accessible and easy-to-understand communication through multiple channels.
- Fair, equitable, compassionate and proportionate treatment of all ratepayers.
- Protection of privacy and confidentiality in accordance with relevant legislation.

- Proactive approaches that reduce the cost and escalation of debt for both Council and ratepayers.
- Continuous improvement through performance measurement, review and adaptation to community needs.
- Community-centred, place-based design that considers local issues and engages local support networks.

4. Policy details

4.1 Payment Terms

Rates and charges are payable in accordance with the instalment due dates set out on Council's rates and charges notice, as prescribed under the Local Government Act 1989.

Where Council permits payment by instalments, the due date of the first instalment is taken to be the due date for payment in full, unless an alternative plan has been approved.

Where a ratepayer has entered into an approved payment plan, direct debit, or other agreed payment plan, the due dates will be those specified in the plan, rather than the legislated instalment dates.

4.2 Flexible payment options available

Council offers a range of flexible payment options and methods for payments of rates and charges including:

- In person at Council offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS or cash up to limits as set in the cash handling policy at Coburg and Brunswick),
- 10-monthly or quarterly instalment direct debit,
- Centrepay,
- BPAY,
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone or online),
- Mail (Cheques and money orders only), and
- Credit-card (Visa or Mastercard).

4.3 Current discounts/rebates available

- Municipal Pensioner Rates Concession

4.4 Payment Plan

Any ratepayer who is having difficulty paying their rates or charges is encouraged to contact Council's Revenue Services Unit to discuss a suitable payment plan that:

- reflects their capacity to pay,
- is tailored to their personal and local circumstances, and
- provides a reasonable and manageable repayment timeframe.

Council adopts a flexible, place-based approach to payment plans and will offer a range of flexible payment options as detailed in section 4.2 that align with the needs of the local community, including those experiencing vulnerability or financial hardship.

Where a payment plan is approved, the agreed instalment amounts and due dates will apply in place of the legislated instalment dates. Council may utilise an external recovery agency to assist with the administration and monitoring of payment plans where appropriate.

An application for a payment plan is available on Council's website and in hard copy at customer service points and include contact details for assistance. The application clearly states:

- what information may be required,
- that further information may be requested if needed, and
- that Council will notify the applicant of the outcome within 10 business days.

Verbal applications are permitted and must meet the same information requirements as written applications. All applications will be supported by Council's standard identity verification processes.

If a payment plan is approved, this will clearly state the schedule of payments, including amount and length of time. The process for which a payment plan can be cancelled will also be communicated. If a payment plan is not accepted, the reason behind the decision will be communicated and refer ratepayers to the internal review process.

4.5 Formal Debt Recovery and Legal Action

Council will make reasonable attempts to contact ratepayers about overdue rates or charges using early and cost-effective methods such as reminder notices, statements, emails or phone calls. Where a payment plan, deferral or hardship application is in place and being complied with, recovery and enforcement action will be suspended. Recovery action will also be suspended while a hardship or payment plan application is under assessment.

If no payment, response, payment plan or hardship application is in place, and all reasonable engagement options have been exhausted, the account may be referred for formal recovery action.

Council will seek to minimise debt recovery costs for both Council and ratepayers by prioritising early and flexible engagement. Any recovery costs incurred through formal enforcement may be recovered from the ratepayer, subject to legislative requirements. Details of applicable debt recovery fees and charges will be published on Council's website.

Where a formal recovery is required, the process documented in Appendix 1 will apply.

4.6 Interest on overdue rates and charges

Interest may be charged on overdue rates and charges in accordance with section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, at a rate fixed by the Minister under the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*.

Interest will be charged following each legislated instalment due date and calculated from the relevant due date, unless an alternative payment plan has been approved.

Interest will not be charged where a ratepayer has an approved payment plan, deferral or hardship payment plan in place and is complying with the agreed terms. Where a ratepayer is experiencing hardship, consideration will be given to waiving of interest for up to one year depending on the ratepayer circumstances.

4.7 Hardship (Deferral of Rates and Charges)

Hardship exists where payment of rates or charges would cause difficulty to a ratepayer in their individual circumstances at the time the amount is payable, even where financial hardship is not present. In accordance with section 170 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may approve a deferral, in full or in part, of rates or charges for a defined period where payment would cause hardship.

A deferral provides a temporary pause on payment obligations and is intended to assist ratepayers experiencing short-term or unexpected difficulty. Interest will not be charged during an approved deferral period.

4.8 Financial Hardship (Waiver of Rates, Charges or Interest)

Financial hardship exists where a ratepayer lacks the financial capacity to meet their rates or charges and payment would prevent them from affording the necessities of life for themselves or their dependants.

Financial hardship may arise from a wide range of personal, social, economic or systemic circumstances, including but not limited to loss or reduction of income, employment difficulties, illness or injury, mental health issues, family violence or economic abuse, elder abuse, death of a family member, addiction, gambling, scams or fraud, incarceration, natural disasters, or barriers to accessing essential services.

For the purposes of sections 171 and 171A of the *Local Government Act 1989*, where a ratepayer is experiencing such circumstances and payment of rates or charges would compromise their ability to meet basic living needs, such as food, housing, essential utilities, medical care, transport, childcare, education or insurance, they will be considered to be in financial hardship.

Consideration will be given to an approval of a waiver, in full or in part, of rates, charges or interest where payment would result in financial hardship. Financial hardship will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the ratepayer's individual circumstances and capacity to pay.

4.9 Hardship Application process

Any ratepayer who is having difficulty paying their rates or charges is encouraged to contact Council's Revenue Services Unit directly, via Council's online, or written hardship or payment plan request process. A ratepayer may request that Council, or its representatives, use an interpreter and/or translator when communicating with them, and such a request will not be unreasonably refused.

Where a ratepayer indicates that they are experiencing financial difficulty, Council will discuss the options available, which may include:

- A short-term payment extension of up to 4-weeks, based on the ratepayer's circumstances and capacity to pay.
- A rates payment plan, negotiated to reflect the ratepayer's capacity to pay. The length and instalment amounts will be set to ensure the plan is realistic and sustainable, rather than subject to a fixed recovery period.

- A deferral of rates or charges for up to 3-months, where payment would cause hardship. The length of the deferral will be determined based on the ratepayer's circumstances and legislative requirements.
- An application for financial hardship, where payment of rates or charges would prevent the ratepayer from affording the necessities of life.
- An application for exceptional circumstances, where it would be unjust for the general rule to apply due to the ratepayer's particular circumstances.

Where an application for financial hardship is made, a referral to an independent financial counsellor or support service may be made with the ratepayer's consent. Any information or report provided by a counsellor will be considered as supporting information but is not mandatory for a decision. The application will be assessed by the appropriate delegated Council officer, and the ratepayer will be advised in writing of the outcome and any relief measures approved.

Payment plans are to be designed to cover current rates and charges, where reasonably possible, to prevent the account from falling further into arrears. Where a ratepayer is unable to meet an agreed payment plan, or indicates that further support is required, a review will be undertaken to reassess the payment plan or hardship status. Interest will not be applied where a ratepayer has an approved hardship plan in place and is complying with the agreed terms.

4.10 Assessment process

The following factors may be considered when assessing an application for financial hardship. Including, but are not limited to, whether the ratepayer:

- has experienced circumstances of hardship (whether short term or ongoing) that will affect their ability to pay.
- has indicated that paying rates or charges would prevent them from affording the necessities of life for themselves or their dependants.
- is receiving Centrelink or other government benefits.
- is on a low or fixed income, including pension or superannuation.
- has been referred by, or is supported by, an accredited financial counsellor, welfare agency or legal assistance service.
- has a payment history that indicates difficulty meeting obligations in the past.
- has provided relevant supporting information; and
- where available or relevant, has provided an independent financial counsellor's written report.

Each application will be assessed on its individual merits and circumstances. Council will not apply automatic exclusions based on property type, land use, ownership of multiple properties or residential status. Decisions will be made having regard to the ratepayer's overall financial circumstances and capacity to pay.

Where supporting documentation is required, Council will clearly advise the ratepayer of what is needed and provide reasonable timeframes for submission. Council will aim to assess applications and notify the ratepayer of the outcome within 10 business days of receiving all required information.

Additional information will only be requested that is directly relevant and necessary to make a decision. All information will be collected and managed in accordance with privacy legislation and Council's privacy policies.

Examples of information that may be considered relevant includes, but is not limited to:

- government agency documentation (e.g. Centrelink, ATO, NDIA, Victoria Police, Courts);
- certified documentation (e.g. medical certificates, financial counsellor referrals, legal documents, statutory declarations); and
- personal financial information where necessary (e.g. payslips, evidence of job loss or reduced hours, unpaid bills, bank statements).

4.11 Review of Decisions and Timeframes

Applications for hardship and financial hardship will be assessed as soon as practicable and aims to provide a written outcome within 10 business days of receiving all required information. Where further information is required, the ratepayer will be advised of what is needed and the assessment timeframe will pause until the information is received.

A ratepayer may request an internal review of a decision within 10 business days of being notified of the outcome. Reviews will be conducted by a Council officer who was not involved in the original decision. Council aims to complete internal reviews within 10 business days and will provide the ratepayer with a written outcome and reasons for the decision.

4.12 Assessment Outcomes

Following assessment of a hardship or financial hardship application, a determination will be made as to the most appropriate outcome having regard to the ratepayer's circumstances, capacity to pay, and the principles of this Policy.

Possible outcomes may include one or more of the following:

- approval of a payment plan or revised payment plan.
- approval of a short-term payment extension.
- approval of a deferral of rates or charges for a defined period.
- approval of a waiver, in full or in part, of rates, charges or interest where financial hardship is established.
- suspension or waiver of interest and lawful recovery costs where appropriate.
- referral to external support services or an independent financial counsellor; or
- refusal of the application, where hardship or financial hardship is not established.

All outcomes will be proportionate to the ratepayer's circumstances and aligned to their capacity to pay. Where an application is refused, a written response with reasons will be provided and the ratepayer will be advised of available alternative options, including payment plans.

4.13 Sale of Land to Recover Unpaid Rates and Charges

Council may sell land, or cause land to be transferred into Council ownership, to recover unpaid rates or charges in accordance with section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. Council may only consider the sale or transfer of land where all of the following apply:

- The amount due for rates or charges (including interest and enforcement costs) is more than three (3) years overdue.
- No current plan exists for payment of the amount (including a payment plan); and
- Council has obtained a Court order requiring payment of the amount (or part of the amount).

For the purposes of this Policy, a plan is not current if any terms of the payment plan are not being met.

Each financial year, Council will receive a report in September documenting outstanding rates balances as well as officers' assessment on identifying land that may meet the legislative criteria for sale or transfer. Any land identified will be subject to an internal assessment and approval process, including legal review, prior to any enforcement action.

Before selling or transferring land, Council must serve written notice on all persons who appear to have an estate or interest in the land, requiring payment of the outstanding amount and providing a copy of section 181.

- Give public notice of its intention to sell or transfer the land; and
- If the land is to be sold by auction, notify affected persons in writing of the auction details.

Council must provide:

- at least four (4) weeks' notice before any sale or transfer; and
- at least fourteen (14) days' notice before any auction.

To ensure transparency Council's decisions commencing the process of selling and the final outcome regarding the sale or transfer of the land will be recorded and made public having regard for information that is deemed confidential.

4.14 Ratepayer responsibilities

When hardship or financial hardship assistance is approved, the ratepayer must enter, and continue to meet, the agreed payment plan for their rates and charges.

If the ratepayer fails to comply with the agreed plan and does not contact Council to discuss alternative arrangements, hardship support may be withdrawn, interest may be reinstated in line with legislation, and debt recovery action may resume.

Ratepayers must provide information that is accurate, complete and not misleading. Where relief has been granted based on financial hardship, the ratepayer must also notify Council of any material change in their circumstances that may affect their eligibility for ongoing support.

In accordance with section 171A of the *Local Government Act 1989*, penalties may apply where a ratepayer provides false or misleading information or fails to notify Council of a relevant change in circumstances.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are outlined in this Policy:

Role	Responsibility
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve a waiver in full or in part, of rates and charges.
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review and approve the merit of applications for exceptional circumstances as referred by the CFO
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff. - Instruct an agent acting for Council to take steps necessary to recover overdue rates and charges, including bringing court proceedings on behalf of Council - Review applications for exceptional circumstances that requests a waiver or partial waiver of rates or charges. - On an annual basis the Chief Financial Officer will provide council a list of ratepayers with high value outstanding debt in relation to rates and charges for consideration to progress to the sale or acquisition of land in satisfaction of the outstanding debt. The report will also include the final outcome of properties previously referred.
Unit Manager Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversight of overall debt levels and to ensure appropriate action is implemented in a timely manner. - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.
Team Leader Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff. - Consider payment plans with longer timeframes to allow for cases of extenuating circumstances (for example long term illness or unemployment)
Senior Revenue & Property Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.
Revenue Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals for no longer than 12-months to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and Review

Finance will monitor the operation of this Policy to ensure it is applied consistently, fairly and in accordance with legislative requirements and the Ministerial Guidelines.

Data relating to hardship applications, payment plans, deferrals, waivers, recovery action and outcomes will be reviewed periodically to identify trends, emerging risks and opportunities for improvement.

Any consideration of escalation to court proceedings or land sale under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* will be based on an individual assessment of the ratepayer's circumstances and will only occur after all reasonable engagement, hardship and support pathways have been exhausted. Escalation will not be based solely on the age or value of the outstanding rates and charges.

This Policy will be formally reviewed at least every three years, or earlier where required by legislative change, audit findings, Ombudsman recommendations or material risk. Any amendments will be approved in accordance with Council's governance framework.

7. Definitions

This section sets out definitions for technical terms and other key terms referred to in the policy that are not in common use.

Term	Definition
Council	Merri-bek City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
Financial Hardship	Financial hardship exists where a ratepayer does not have the financial capacity to pay their rates or charges and doing so would prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life for themselves or their dependants, in accordance with the Ministerial Guidelines and sections 171 and 171A of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> .
Hardship	Hardship exists where a ratepayer is experiencing difficulty paying their rates or charges in their current circumstances, but payment would not necessarily prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life.
Place-based approach	A place-based approach is a framework that requires Council to respond to hardship and financial hardship in a way that reflects the specific characteristics, needs and challenges of its local community.
Ratepayer	Is the occupier of any rateable property who is liable to pay residential, commercial or industrial rates. This maybe the property owner or a tenant who under the lease agreement is liable to pay rates.
Specific Regulation	A regulation set out in the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> , <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> , the <i>Magistrates Court Act 1989</i> or the <i>Infringements Act 2006</i>

8. Associated Documents

- S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff

9. References

- Victorian Ombudsman Report: Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship. Date posted: 5 May 2021
- Introduction of Local Government Legislation amendment (Rating and other matters) Bill 2022
- Ministerial Guidelines for Council Relating to Payment of Rates and Charges December 2025

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10. Appendix 1 – Formal Debt Recovery Process

Where formal recovery is required, the following process will apply:

- Accounts may be referred to Council's debt recovery agency only where all reasonable engagement and support options have been exhausted, and where no payment, response, payment plan, deferral or hardship application is in place or under assessment.
- Before any referral occurs, Council must have made reasonable attempts to contact the ratepayer and advised them in writing of the outstanding rates or charges and the available options, including payment plans, deferrals and hardship assistance.
- Once referred, the debt recovery agency will contact the ratepayer on Council's behalf, confirm that they are acting under Council's instruction, and provide details of the outstanding amount and the available options to resolve the account.
- Where no communication, payment or acceptable plan is received, a final demand may be issued on Council's behalf advising that failure to respond may result in further recovery action in accordance with legislation.
- A Council officer may authorise the debt recovery agency to take further steps to recover unpaid rates and charges, including legal proceedings, where all hardship and engagement pathways have been exhausted and it is appropriate to do so.
- Unless an acceptable payment plan or hardship plan is entered into, payment in full, including any lawful recovery costs, may be required before recovery action is withdrawn.
- Accounts referred to the debt recovery agency may remain under their management and be updated from time to time with outstanding rates, charges and applicable interest until the balance is paid in full or otherwise resolved.
- Any escalation to court proceedings or consideration of land sale under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* must also comply with the escalation safeguards set out in the Monitoring, Evaluating and Review section of this Policy.



Hardship Policy

Date Authorised by Council: 14 September
Commencement Date: 1 October 2022
Review Date: 1 July 2026
Responsible Department: Business Transformation



1. Introduction

This policy outlines the principles that Council officers must consider when collecting debt and providing relief to individuals who are experiencing financial hardship.

2. Context

2.1 Alignment

Council implemented a COVID Hardship Policy to provide a policy framework to provide financial relief to individuals and business who may need assistance from the impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic. This Policy expired on the 30th of June 2022.

The updated Hardship Policy has been structured to incorporate long-term assistance provisions that may be required to support individuals and businesses to recover. It also addresses the observations made in the Victorian Ombudsman's review of Hardship - Local Councils as published in May 2021.

2.2 Organisational Context

Council commonly enters transactions where payment is not received for provision of the goods and services or application of fines. Thus, Council provides credit to those parties from the time that the service or good is provided (or fine levied) until they pay the full amount due. During that time, Council must recognise those parties as debtors.

In considering all aspects of debt collection, Council must consider that some debtors may be experiencing financial distress or hardship and in the principles of fairness, transparency and equity, relief may be provided to those individuals who are experiencing financial hardship.

3. Objectives

To provide transparency when collecting and providing for debts owed to Council and to ensure Council manages its accounts receivable in such a way that it does not jeopardise the funding of its operations. The objective is also to take into consideration the financial hardship of debtors and requirements under the Local Government Act 1989.



The policy is guided by the following principles:

- Transparency, efficiency, capacity to pay and equity by treating all debtors consistently and in a fair manner.
- Customers are encouraged to utilise financial counselling, legal and other supports.
- Legal action to recover debt should be the last resort.

4. Policy details

4.1 Payment Terms

Council's payment terms are 28 days from the date the document is issued unless specific regulations apply, or an alternative due date is displayed.

4.2 Payment Arrangements

Any debtor who is having trouble in paying a debt is encouraged to contact Council's Finance Unit to make a payment arrangement to pay off the debt in a reasonable and manageable timeframe. Depending on the element of the debt, provision of service may not commence until the debt is paid. Council's payment plans may be managed by our appointed external collection agency.

4.3 Continuation of Provision of Service

In some cases, Council will continue to supply services regardless of outstanding debts.

In the case where the service is discretionary (for example Sports Ground Hire) and is not governed by specific regulation the relevant Department or Unit must not continue to supply service where debts are more than 60 days old, and no payment arrangement has been agreed.

4.4 Debt Recovery

Council will make a reasonable attempt to contact a customer about their overdue account. This may include a reminder letter, account statement, email or phone call.



Council will not pursue further recovery action against a ratepayer who has an agreed periodic payment arrangement, while the arrangement is current, and the ratepayer adheres to the agreed repayment schedule. Council reserves the right to renegotiate or cancel a payment arrangement should circumstances change where the debt will not be paid within a reasonable time frame.

All debt that does not have an active payment plan, deferral or hardship application in place or in progress, may be referred for formal debt collection. Where these terms cannot be met the account will generally be referred for recovery action as detailed in paragraph 4.6. The debtor will be liable for all legal costs incurred by Council in the debt collection process.

4.5 Interest on overdue rates and charges

Interest will be charged on overdue rates and charges in accordance with section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989 (Act)*, unless otherwise specified in this policy and will be set at the prevailing rate fixed by the Minister.

The interest will be calculated at the rate fixed under the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*. Interest is calculated from the legislated date the rates and charges are due.

The interest will not be charged to accounts where a payment plan or deferral is in place and the debtor is adhering to the agreed repayments and timeframes.

4.6 Legal Process

Accounts may be forwarded to Council's debt collection agent for recovery action based on the following actions by the debtor or ratepayer:

- Has been uncontactable for the Council or Council has notified the person in writing and advises them of available payment options, including deferrals and payment plans; and
- It has been at least 24 months since that occurred and the person has not deferred the payment, entered a payment plan or used any other available payment option. Noting: this does not apply to legal action to recover the payment of fines.

Contact will be made by the debt collection agent detailing the debt and confirming they have been instructed to act on Council's behalf to recover the debt and providing contract instruction.



If no communication, payment or payment arrangement has been received, then a final demand letter will be sent on Council's behalf to recover the debt and advise that failure to attend to the request may result in further legal action and costs.

The Chief Financial Officer may instruct an agent acting for Council to take steps necessary to recover overdue rates and charges, including bringing court proceedings on behalf of Council.

Unless an acceptable payment arrangement is made, payment in full including all legal outlays is required prior to the withdrawal of the recovery action.

Accounts referred to the debt recovery agent may be left under their control and updated from time to time with the balance of accruing rates, charges and interest until the debt is paid in full.

4.7 Financial Hardship

Financial hardship is a circumstance of experiencing a lack of financial means, which may be either ongoing or temporary. Some common causes of financial hardship are, but not limited to; loss of employment, family violence or breakdown, illness of the debtor or family member or death.

A business is considered to be in financial hardship when facing closure, disconnection of utilities, repossession of a vehicle necessary to the operation of the business or imminent legal action for non-payment of debts.

To establish financial hardship under this policy, the person or business must also show that the financial hardship is capable of remedy if payment arrangements were to change.

4.8 Financial hardship principles

The principles of Council's hardship framework are:

- Early identification as successful hardship programs have good identification and communication strategies;
- Accessibility to information about hardship programs, including proactive material on council websites and rates notices;
- A range of forms of assistance should be available;



- The form of hardship assistance provided should match the level of financial difficulty;
- Council should encourage ratepayers to utilise financial counselling, legal and other supports; and
- Legal action to recover debt should be a last resort.

4.9 Application process

Any debtor who is having trouble in paying a debt is encouraged to contact Council's Finance Unit directly or via the late payments form. If they feel that they are experiencing financial hardship council will discuss the options available in relation to the application being:

- An application for Rate special payment arrangement (Payment Plan). Where evidence of financial stress is indicated, a payment plan will be negotiated. Where possible the payment plan should be set to recover the arrears within twelve-month period to prevent the account from falling further behind.
- An application for Rate special payment arrangement (Deferral 3 Months). Where evidence of financial stress is indicated, a deferral for a period not to exceed 3 months may be considered by council rate staff.
- An application for Financial Hardship. Council will provide debtor with a referral to an independent financial counsellor; Debtor will attend appointment with financial counsellor, who will then provide Council with a written report detailing the debtor's financial circumstances and recommendation in relation to the relief measures required. The report will then be assessed by the Unit Manager Finance and a financial hardship approval/rejection letter will be issued with confirmation of relief measures to be applied.
- An application for Exceptional Circumstances. Council will provide the opportunity for relief or deferral of payments based on a person's particular circumstances where it would be unjust for the general rule to apply.

Payment negotiated for payment plans should ensure current rates and charges are paid as issued to ensure the account does not fall further in arrears.



Arrangements with periods greater than those outlined above may be approved in cases of extenuating circumstances (for example long term illness or unemployment) at the recommendation of the Team Leader, Rates.

Where a debtor has been unable to meet the special payment arrangements or has indicated further deferral may be required, a referral for hardship assessment will be offered. If referral is not acceptable to the ratepayer, interest will apply regardless for the amount or timeframes.

4.10 Assessment process

The following items will be considered when assessing a financial hardship application:

- A summary of previous payment history with council;
- Debtors payment history;
- Severity of financial hardship (temporary financial stress or financial hardship); and
- Independent financial counsellors written report.

Financial hardship will not be granted in the following circumstances:

- When the rates financial hardship application is not for the ratepayer's principal place of residence;
- When the rates financial hardship application is not for a residential assessment;
- When rates are due on vacant land;
- When the debtor is an owner of multiple properties (whether they are all located in Moreland or not); and
- When the application is not supported by the Financial Councillor.



4.11 Hardship relief

Relief to a debtor experiencing hardship may include legal action recovery being suspended, interest being placed on hold, an interest waiver, waiver of legal fees incurred or a rates payment deferral.

4.12 Debtor responsibilities

If financial hardship is approved by Council, the debtor must enter into a payment arrangement where an amount is paid on a regular basis to clear all outstanding debt within a reasonable timeframe.

If the payment arrangement (as above) is not maintained, financial hardship status will be reversed, and the appropriate recovery action will recommence.

4.13 Waiver of rates and charges

Council does not allow the waiver of rates or charges except in exceptional circumstances. This is to ensure that financial hardship assistance offered to one group of ratepayers does not adversely impact other ratepayers. An exceptional circumstances waiver would be appropriate only if the person's particular circumstances made it unjust for the general rule to apply. Their circumstances would need to distinguish their situation from that of the many other people who do have to repay their debts.

Any application made for exceptional circumstances that requests a waiver or partial waiver of rates or charges will be reviewed by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). At the discretion of the CFO, the application may be referred to the Chief Executive Officer for approval.

In most instances, council is unable to waiver the Fire Services Levy.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are outlined in this Policy:

Role	Responsibility
Chief Executive Officer	- Review and approve the merit of applications for exceptional circumstances as referred by the CFO



Chief Financial Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chief Financial Officer may instruct an agent acting for Council to take steps necessary to recover overdue rates and charges, including bringing court proceedings on behalf of Council - Review applications made for exceptional circumstances that requests a waiver or partial waiver of rates or charges. - On a bi-annual basis and at the recommendation of the debt recovery agent, the Chief Financial Officer will provide council a list of ratepayers with high value outstanding debt in relation to rates and charges for consideration to progress to the sale or acquisition of land in satisfaction of the outstanding debt.
Manager, Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversight of overall debt levels and to ensure appropriate action is implemented in a timely manner.
Team Leader Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider payment arrangements with longer timeframes to allow for cases of extenuating circumstances (for example long term illness or unemployment)

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and review

On a bi-annual basis and at the recommendation of the debt recovery agent, the Chief Financial Officer will provide a list of ratepayers with high value outstanding debt in relation to rates and charges for consideration to progress to the sale or acquisition of land in satisfaction of the outstanding debt.

Action of this nature is not progressed without resolution from Council. To protect the identity of the rate payer, this report is provided as a confidential report.

7. Definitions

This section sets out definitions for technical terms and other key terms referred to in the policy that are not in common use.

Term	Definition
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Council	Moreland City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 2020
Debt	Debt is the amount (of money) owed by a debtor because of a transaction with Council.
Debtor	Debtor refers to the individual, organisation or other party that owes a debt because of a transaction with Council.
Ratepayer	Is the occupier of any rateable property who is liable to pay rates. This maybe the property owner or a tenant who under the lease agreement is liable to pay rates
Specific Regulation	A regulation set out in the Local Government Act 1989, Local Government Act 2020, the Magistrates Court Act 1989 or the Infringements Act 2006

8. Associated Documents

- Infringements Act 2006
- Accounts Receivable Policy
- S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff

9. References

- Victorian Ombudsman Report: Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship. Date posted: 5 May 2021
- Introduction of Local Government Legislation amendment (Rating and other matters) Bill 2022

7.8 2025-26 THIRD QUARTER FINANCIAL REPORT

Acting Director Business Transformation, Anita Curnow

Financial Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the 2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 28 February 2026, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.
2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.
3. Notes the full-year forecast for operating income of \$285.0 million, operating expenditure of \$250.5 million and an accounting surplus of \$34.5 million arising from the Third Quarter Financial Review.
4. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$68.9 million, arising from the 2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Review.
5. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program (\$11.7 million):
 - a) Fully or partially grant (or external) funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:
 - Oak Park Sports and Aquatic – Electrification - \$1,293,194
 - Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade – W heatsheaf Rd - \$917,861
 - Mitchell Parade Retaining Wall - \$828,947
 - Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek - \$780,000
 - b) Reserve funded projects:
 - Balam Balam Place North West Building – Phoenix Street - \$289,118
 - Park Renewal, Volga Street/Middle Street (Design) - \$100,000
 - Park Renewal, Calder Reserve (Design and Construct) - \$52,700
 - Park Renewal, Gordon St – Minor Works - \$50,000
 - Coburg Library and Piazza Redevelopment - \$40,000
 - c) Rates funded projects:
 - Dunstan Reserve Childcare - \$1,600,000
 - Heavy Vehicles Replacement Program - \$1,270,000
 - Wheeler Street - Retaining Wall - \$915,000
 - Road Reconstruction, OHea Street from Lonsdale St to Clifton Grove - \$700,000
 - Light Vehicles Replacement Program - \$666,603
 - Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Crowley To Rhodes - \$600,000
 - Drainage, Moama Crescent and Jhonson Street - Hot Spot No 21 - \$266,650
 - Electricity Capacity Upgrades at Hadfield Depot - \$200,000
 - McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Social Room Amenities & Kitchen - \$200,000
 - Footpath & Bikepath Renewals - \$200,000
 - Wombat Crossing - West Street - \$200,000
 - Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin - \$150,000
 - Holbrook Reserve Pavilion and Gender Inclusive Change Rooms - \$139,538
 - Glenroy Movement and Place Plan - \$80,000

- McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Pavillion Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$50,000
 - Corporate Carbon Reduction - \$50,000
 - Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide - \$47,291
 - Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$30,000
 - DeChene Reserve – Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$28,460
6. Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$0.8 million):
- Merri Creek Trail Realignment – Bowden Reserve - \$300,000
 - Oak Park Pool – Blanket Replacement - \$180,000
 - Stormwater Rectification - \$110,000
 - Coburg Leisure Centre – Locker Replacement - \$70,000
 - Council Chambers Artwork Restoration - \$50,000
 - ATC Cook Reserve – Off-street Carpark - \$25,000
 - Body Worn Cameras & Radios - \$23,039
7. Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.4 million):
- Allard Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$329,459
 - Forward Road Design - \$224,645
 - Road Reconstruction, Devon Street from View to Oak - \$221,493
 - Road Reconstruction, Jersey St from Ohea to Gaffney – Both Carriageways - \$89,000
 - Road Reconstruction, Fowler Street from Walsh to Dead End - \$70,274
 - Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$64,000
 - Minor Park – Tate Reserve (Removal) - \$50,903
 - Brunswick Early Years Hub - \$50,691
 - York Street Park Close to Home - \$43,387
 - Business Transformation – mobile phone purchases - \$41,625
 - Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project - \$32,034
 - Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades - \$31,500
 - Shore Reserve – Football & Cricket - \$30,000
 - Victoria Street Brunswick West MCHC - \$27,979
 - City Infrastructure – mobile phone purchases - \$20,317
 - Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - \$18,681
 - Municipal Art Collection - \$18,000
 - Glenroy College – Open Space - \$10,000
 - Gowanbrae Dog Park - \$9,624
 - Road Reconstruction, Herbert Street from Pascoe Vale to Dead End - \$5,599
 - Community – mobile phone purchases - \$4,679
 - Place & Environment – mobile phone purchases - \$2,772
 - Public Art Program Across Merri-bek - \$1,369
 - Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$783
 - Fawkner Transport Study Projects - \$5,763
8. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$ 1.7 million):
- Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Arndt to Crowley - \$757,571
 - Road Reconstruction, Grandview Ave from Brearley to Princes - \$231,657
 - Road Reconstruction, Baxter Street from Sydney Kerb Line to Railway Kerb Line - \$197,576
 - Alva Gr from Urquhart to Bell, Road Reconstruction - \$189,683
 - Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin 1 - \$100,000
 - Kent Road - Separated Bike Lane Trial - \$87,585

- Hosken Reserve Stage 3 Football Pitches - \$66,181
 - De Carle Street from Donald to Davies Road Reconstruction - \$53,108
 - Balfe Parks Sports Field Lights - \$44,550
 - Batman Avenue Shared Path - Upfield Shared Path - \$305
9. Notes, as at the end of the third quarter, as per Section 97 (3) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, the Chief Executive Officer is of the opinion that a revised budget is not required, however impacts to the full year forecast will continue to be closely monitored.

REPORT

Executive Summary

The Third Quarter Financial Report outlines Council's progress in delivering the adopted/approved budget. It compares actual revenue and expenditure against year-to-date (YTD) budget figures and evaluates second-quarter financial performance to project the expected result for 30 June 2026.

At the end of February 2026, a comprehensive financial review was completed across the organisation to produce the 2025–26 Third Quarter Financial Review (Q3 Forecast). This process allows Council to assess its YTD performance and redirect available financial resources to better support its strategic priorities. The outcomes of this review are presented in this report as the Q3 Forecast.

For the eight months ended 28 February 2026 an operating surplus of \$88.2 million was achieved, which is \$1.9 million lower than the YTD budget of \$90.1 million. It is important to note that the operating surplus does not convert to immediately available cash to Council. Surplus funds are used to fund important community infrastructure projects as well being restricted by legislation for future infrastructure investment.

Council's forecast adjusted underlying surplus of \$18.1 million is \$1.5 million more than the Q2 forecast of \$16.6 million. This result is important as it measures Council's ability to generate a surplus in the ordinary course of business – excluding non-recurrent capital grants, non-monetary asset contributions, and other contributions to fund capital expenditure from net results.

As set out in the issues section of this report, operating surplus funds do not convert to immediately available cash to Council. The accounting surplus includes items such as non-cash contributions, capital grants and is used to fund items such as loan repayments, the rates funded capital works program and transfers (savings) via reserves.

Council has spent \$30.8 million on capital expenditure, which is tracking below the year-to-date (YTD) budget of \$46.1 million, with \$63.1 million budget remaining.

After a detailed review of the capital works program, there is a forecast decrease of \$11.2 million from the Q2 forecast of \$80.1 million to \$68.9 million. This is due to \$11.7 million of additional carry forwards into 2026-27 and \$2.0 million of savings, offset by 46 projects requiring additional funding of \$2.4 million and \$0.1 million of carry forwards required to be brought forward.

Previous Council Decisions

2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Report – 11 February 2026

That Council:

1. *Notes the 2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 31 December 2025, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.*
2. *Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.*

3. *Notes the full-year forecast for operating income of \$286.9 million, operating expenditure of \$249.8 million and an accounting surplus of \$37.0 million arising from the Second Quarter Financial Review.*
4. *Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$80.1 million, arising from the 2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Review.*
5. *Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program (\$20.8 million):*
 - a) *Fully or partially grant (or external) funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:*
 - *Fawkner Netball Club Roof – \$4,483,220*
 - *Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek – \$2,000,000*
 - *Victoria St - Streets for People – \$2,000,000*
 - *Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades – \$813,421*
 - *40 km/h Rollout - Traffic Calming – \$400,000*
 - *Sportsfield Lighting - Dunstan Reserve (N&S) – \$400,000*
 - *Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment – \$64,338*
 - b) *Reserve funded projects:*
 - *Park Renewal, Loyola Ave Pitt St (Design, Construct and Road Closure – \$300,000*
 - *Park Renewal, Calder Reserve (Design and Construct) – \$282,600*
 - *Parks and Reserve Flooding Rectification – \$200,000*
 - *Central Coburg Roads and Drainage – \$150,000*
 - c) *Rates funded projects:*
 - *McDonald Reserve Hockey Pitch - \$3,422,218*
 - *Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade - Wheatsheaf Rd – \$1,351,912*
 - *Heavy Vehicles Replacement Program – \$1,000,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Arndt to Crowley – \$800,000*
 - *West Street Neighbourhood Streetscape – \$721,000*
 - *DeChene Reserve - Gender Inclusive Facilities – \$702,775*
 - *Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide – \$550,000*
 - *O'Hea St Bike Path Extension - Sussex to Derby St – \$400,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Tinning Street from Walter to Patterson – \$300,000*
 - *Fawkner Transport Study Projects- \$236,486*
 - *Hadfield Depot Masterplan Development & Drainage - \$200,000*
 - *Coburg Town Hall Upgrade – \$80,000*
 - *Carelink Go+ Device Purchases – \$59,584*
 - *Accommodation Changes to Meet Service Demand – \$50,000*
 - *Fawkner Library Upgrade Works - \$50,000*
 - *Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$20,000*
 - *Holbrook Reserve Pavilion and Gender Inclusive Change Rooms - \$10,000*
 - d) *Adjustment to rates funded projects previously approved*
 - *Coburg Outdoor Pool - 8 X 15 Toddlers Pool – (\$175,000)*
6. *Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.2 million):*
 - *Wheeler Street – Retaining Wall - \$920,000*
 - *Brunswick Baths Changeroom Works - \$175,905*
 - *Union Street – Sinkhole/Cavity Remediation Works - \$100,510*
 - *Raeburn Lighting Pole Rectification - \$36,000*

7. Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.5 million):

- Park Renewal – Sewell Reserve - \$278,852
- Reactive Drainage Program - \$266,570
- Wombat Crossings – Barrow St & Blair St, Coburg - \$200,000
- Light Plant and Equipment Replacement Program - \$200,000
- Brunswick City Baths Repainting & Renewal - \$160,000
- Raised Intersection – Landells Rd & Essex St, Pascoe Vale - \$116,000
- Narre Narre Stadium Floor Renewal - \$109,264
- 115 Nicholson Street Footpath Upgrade - \$60,000
- Gowanbrae Dog Park - \$19,051
- Municipal Art Collection - \$13,115
- Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project - \$6,617
- Road Reconstruction, Herbert Street from Pascoe Vale to Dead End - \$6,356
- Road Reconstruction, Fowler Street from Walsh to Dead End - \$4,817
- Brunswick Early Years Hub - \$4,500
- Pedestrian Access & Priority Treatments - \$4,024
- Public Art Program Across Merri-bek - \$1,385
- Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$1,182
- Park Renewal – Soudan St - \$312

8. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$ 4.5 million):

- Drainage, Union St from Millward St to Brunswick Rd - \$1,450,000
- Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Fawkner to Longview - \$353,393
- Brunswick Activity Centre Upgrade Works – Wilson Ave - \$350,061
- Road Reconstruction, Jersey St from Ohea to Gaffney – Both Carriageways - \$306,920
- Sim Cr & Victoria St – Engeny Hot Spot No 8 - \$212,027
- Road Reconstruction, Tinning Street from Patterson to Garnet - \$202,044
- Light Vehicles Replacement Program - \$200,000
- School Active Travel and Safety Infrastructure - \$200,000
- Jukes Rd & William St, Fawkner – Priority Crossing - \$150,000
- Climate Vulnerability Implementation – Buildings - \$120,000
- Brunswick Baths – Modifications for Improvements to AV, IT & Lighting Systems - \$120,000
- Raeburn Reserve – Cricket Training Nets - \$114,013
- Parker Reserve – Baseball – Change Room & Refurbishment - \$109,264
- Rehabilitation, Moonee Pde from Jewel to Union - \$100,000
- Bain Avenue from Plaisted to Boundary, Road Reconstruction - \$97,746
- Balfe Parks Sports Field Lights - \$83,113
- Fawkner Transport Study Projects - \$64,000
- Footpath & Bikepath Renewals - \$60,000
- Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$52,000
- Large Scale WSUD (Sportsfield Stormwater Reuse) - \$43,799
- Brunswick City Baths Community Meeting Space - \$40,000
- Park Renewal – Esslemont Reserve - \$30,000
- Additional Seating on Walking Routes to Shops - \$2,250

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2025-26 First Quarter Financial Report – 12 November 2025

That Council:

1. Notes the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 30 September 2025, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.

2. *Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.*
3. *Notes the increase to the full-year forecast for operating income of \$9.2 million and the increase to operating expenditure of \$6.0 million arising from the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Review.*
4. *Approves a decrease of \$2.7 million to the transfer to the Significant Projects Reserve (to \$1.8 million) in 2025-26 to fund additional expenditure relating to the Elevate Transformation Program and the bring forward of the Coburg basketball feasibility study. This reduction will be offset by a corresponding increase to the reserve in the 2026-2030 budget.*
5. *Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$102.9 million, arising from the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Review.*
6. *Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program:*
 - a) *Fully or partially grant funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:*
 - *AG Gillon Stormwater Harvesting - \$1,000,000*
 - *Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - \$611,324.*
 - b) *Rates funded projects:*
 - *Bin Purchases (waste charge funded) - \$2,258,519*
 - *West Street Neighbourhood Streetscape - \$1,000,000*
 - *DeChene Reserve - Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$700,421*
 - *Coburg Outdoor Pool - 8 X 15 Toddlers Pool - \$175,000*
 - *Fawkner Library Upgrade Works - \$70,000.*
7. *Brings forward the following capital project funding to the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*
 - *Brunswick Early Years Hub (grant funded) - \$261,663*
 - *Coburg Olympic Pool - Repainting - \$135,000*
 - *Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$50,000.*
8. *Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*
 - *Fawkner Netball Club Roof (grant funded) - \$4,560,000*
 - *Jukes Rd & William St, Fawkner - Priority Crossing (grant funded) - \$437,000*
 - *Blackspot Project - Intersection of Widford St & View St, Glenroy (grant funded) - \$263,900*
 - *Raised Crossing - Everett St & Moreland Rd (SLRSP) (grant funded) - \$184,000*
 - *Electric Vehicle Chargers (externally funded) - \$170,000 (previously budgeted as operating)*
 - *Emergency Road Works - Ivy St, Brunswick - \$104,010*
 - *Blackspot Project - Intersection of Albert St & Wilkinson St, Brunswick (grant funded) - \$57,330*
 - *Brunswick Bowls Club - \$16,646*
 - *Albion St/Lillian St Rectification - \$15,000*
 - *Glenroy Community Hub - Electrical Works - \$10,815*
 - *Coburg Lake Bridge Rectification Works - \$10,620.*
9. *Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*
 - *Mitchell Parade Retaining Walls (grant funded) - \$1,068,852*
 - *Drainage, Moama Crescent and Jhonson Street - Hot Spot No 21 - \$381,650*
 - *Victoria St - Streets for People (grant funded) - \$374,000*

- York Street Park Close to Home (reserve funded) - \$265,374
- Rehabilitation, Moonee Pde from Jewel to Union - \$245,000
- Wombat Crossings - Barrow St & Blair St, Coburg - \$200,000
- Brunswick City Baths Repainting & Renewal - \$174,345
- Road Reconstruction, Katawa Grove from Cooraminta to Dead End - \$168,000
- 40 km/h Rollout - Traffic Calming - \$100,000
- South Street - Engeny Hot Spot No 12 - \$99,404
- Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$85,485
- South Street from Jensen to West, Road Reconstruction - \$82,866
- Fawkner Leisure Centre Redevelopment - \$55,195
- South Street from Dickinson to Everitt, Road Reconstruction - \$51,421
- Park Renewal - Soudan St (reserve funded) - \$48,599
- Building Maintenance - Capital Purchases - \$28,138
- Fallon St From Union to Collier Both Carriageways - \$16,889
- Park Renewal - Beccles / Oulton Reserve (reserve funded) - \$12,974
- Tyson Street from Jukes Rd to Denys Street, Road Reconstruction - \$12,028
- Mobile Phone Purchases - \$15,408
- Shade Sail Installation - Anne Sgro Child Care (grant funded) - \$6,302.

10. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:

- Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Lonsdale St to Clifton Grove - \$548,786
- Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Montefiore St to Lonsdale St - \$425,878
- Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Sussex St to Bishop St - \$356,397
- Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Bishop St to Montefiore St - \$350,514
- Road Reconstruction, Dalgety Street from Hope to Whitby - \$325,000
- Road Reconstruction, Devon Street from View to Oak - \$300,000
- Park Renewal, Cox Reserve, including playground upgrade (reserve funded) - \$227,239
- School Active Travel and Safety Infrastructure - \$200,000
- Road Reconstruction, Garden Street from Belfast to Glenlyon (both Carriageways) - \$165,237
- Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$143,000
- Wombat Crossing - Albion to Melville - \$115,000
- Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades - \$95,755
- Patterson Street from Tinning to Albion, Road Reconstruction - \$26,760
- Parker Reserve - Baseball - Change Room & Refurbishment - \$25,000
- Snell Gve-Public Toilet-Snell Gve, Oak Park - \$15,859
- Fawkner Community Hall - CB Smith Reserve - \$7,000.

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2024-25 Financial Statements and Performance Statements – 10 September 2025

That Council, in accordance with the recommendations of the Audit and Risk Committee, and having considered Council’s Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 Statements at Attachments 1 and 2 to this report:

1. Approves ‘in principle’ the Financial and Performance Statements 2024-25.
2. Authorises the Mayor, Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor, Cr Helen Politis, and the Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, to certify the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 in their final form.
3. Carries forward the \$473,339 of tied operating funding that were not spent as of 30 June 2025.
4. Carries forward the \$32,410,329 of capital project funds into the 2025/26 Capital Works Program.

5. *Authorises the Principal Accounting Officer to implement any minor administrative changes to the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 if recommended by the Auditor-General upon final review, for approval by the Chief Executive Officer.*

1. Policy Context

The 2025-2029 Budget was adopted by Council on 23 June 2025. The Budget sets out the resources required to deliver the Council Plan, Services and Capital Works Program for the 2025-26 financial year.

This report supports Council's continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-bek on behalf of its ratepayers.

2. Background

Section 97 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that the Chief Executive Officer must ensure that a quarterly budget report is presented to Council at a Council meeting which is open to the public after the end of each quarter of the financial year.

The purpose of this report is to compare the actual and budgeted results to date and provide an explanation of any material variations. This report also includes the results of Q3 forecasts which assesses the financial trends that have occurred in the first three quarters of the 2025-26 financial year to determine a forecast outcome for 30 June 2026.

3. Issues

Operating Performance Summary

Year to Date Result

For the eight months ended 28 February 2026, an operating surplus \$88.2 million was recorded, which is \$1.9 million (2%) less than the year to date (YTD) budget of \$90.1 million. This comprises total revenue of \$249.5 million which is \$4.3 million (2%) more than the YTD budget of \$245.1 million and total expenditure of \$161.3 million which is \$6.3 million (4%) more than the YTD budget of \$155.0 million.

Council adopted the 2025-26 budget projecting an accounting surplus of \$43.3 million in June 2025.

Further details on the year-to-date result are included in **Attachment 1**.

Forecast Year End Result (Q3 result)

Although the Q2 forecast projected an accounting surplus of \$37.0 million for 30 June 2026, this has now been revised to \$34.5 million in Q3. This is an unfavourable movement of \$2.5 million. Q3 also forecasts an adjusted underlying surplus of \$18.2 million which is \$1.6 million more than the Q2 forecast.

Although the Q3 result remains an underlying surplus (underlying result), the higher surplus compared to the Q2 forecast indicates an incline in the operating position. While the underlying result has increased, the unrestricted result is forecasting an improvement from a \$0.2 million deficit to a \$0.5 million surplus. This is primarily due to \$4.2 million of savings from rates funded capital projects.

Further details Q1, Q2 and Q3 year-end forecast results are included in **Attachment 1**.

Capital Performance Summary

Year to Date Result

\$30.8 million has been spent on capital expenditure to 28 February 2026 which is \$15.3 million (33%) less than the YTD original budget, with \$63.1 million (67%) of the original budget remaining.

Forecast Year End Result (Q3 result)

The capital works program is forecast to decrease by \$11.2 million from the Q2 forecast of \$80.1 million as a result of:

- \$11.7 million of additional carry forwards into 2026-27 identified in the Q3 forecast.
- \$1.7 million of savings.
- 46 projects requiring additional funding of \$1.4 million.

There remains \$38.1 million (45%) of the Q3 forecast to be spent, and further details on the Q3 forecast movement are included under **Attachment 2**.

Financial Position Summary

Year to Date Result

Council is still showing a strong balance sheet position, with cash assets at \$110.7 million as at 28 February. This is a \$14.5 million increase on 30 June 2025 cash levels, mainly due to the timing of when the rates instalments fall due and lagging spend in the capital works program. Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors, including the timing of rates instalments as well as lower than anticipated delivery of Capital Works program.

Forecast Year End Result (Q3 result)

The forecast financial position for 30 June 2026 is a cash and investment position of \$91.7 million (an increase of \$10.0 million compared to the Q2 forecast) and net current assets of \$81.3 million (an increase of \$10.0 million compared to the Q2 forecast). These increases are primarily due to the increase in cash resulting from the forecast decrease in rates funded capital works of \$8.6 million in 2025-26.

Public Council Resolutions included in the Q3 forecast

Council makes decisions to refer budget items to a quarterly review, whether savings or additional costs. The table below shows the public Council resolutions that have been accounted for in the Q3 forecast.

Council Report	Council Meeting	Source	\$
7.1 Pride Civic Artwork	February 2026	Rates	20,000
7.8 Contract Award: RFT-2025-56 Road Reconstruction – Northumberland Road, Pascoe Vale (Arndt Road to Rhodes Parade)	February 2026	Rates	(757,571)
5.1 (Confidential Report) Contract Award: RFT-2025-47 – Management of Council’s Aquatic and Leisure Services	February 2026 - Special Council Meeting	Rates	257,011
Rates funded resolutions			(150,926)

Key Definitions

Surplus – is reported based on the Australian Accounting Standards and includes all operating income and expenditure recognised in the financial period, including gifted subdivisional assets (non-monetary), developer contributions and grants towards capital works projects. It is important to note that the surplus is not a cash surplus. It does not convert to immediately available cash for Council. Significant amounts of the surplus are restricted by legislation and must be used for future infrastructure investment.

Adjusted underlying surplus – is the surplus for the year adjusted for non-recurrent capital grants and contributions. It is an accepted measure of financial sustainability as it is not impacted by non-recurring or once-off items of revenue and expenses that can often mask the operating results.

Unrestricted result – this is the net funding result after considering the funding requirements to meet loan principal repayments and transfers to and from reserves.

Solvency Assessment

Council officers have reviewed Council's liquidity (Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities), and the revised forecast is 2.3. The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) recommends that this ratio be 1.5 or higher. This is a positive result and shows that Council is solvent.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. There are no Human Rights impacts.

4. Community Consultation and Engagement

Community consultation and engagement was not required for this report as it reflects the performance against the budget and delivery of the capital works program.

Advice was sought from officers across Council to provide performance results for the Third Quarter Financial Review.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views. There are no individual rights or interests affected.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The overall corporate objective is to deliver the 2025-26 budget with the best possible outcome for Council and the community, and in line with the approved revised forecast targets.

7. Implementation

Subject to Council's decision, the matters outlined in the Third Quarter Financial Report will be implemented.

The financial position of Council and the progress of the capital works program will continue to be monitored and managed.

Attachment/s

1	Council Quarterly Financial Report - February 2026	D26/123476
2	Capital Works Program - 2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Review	D26/118659



Council Quarterly Financial Management Report

8 Months Ended February 2026

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Executive Summary

Operating Performance

For the eight months ended 28 February 2026, Council recorded an operating surplus of \$88.2 million which is \$1.9 million (2%) less than the year to date (YTD) budget of \$90.1 million. This comprises total revenue of \$249.5 million which is \$4.3 million (2%) more than the YTD budget of \$245.1 million and total expenditure of \$161.3 million which is \$6.3 million (4%) unfavourable compared to the YTD budget of \$155 million.

Income Statement	YTD	YTD	YTD	YTD	Annual Budget	Annual Forecast	Annual Variance
	Actuals	Budget	Variance	Variance			
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	%	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Total Revenue	249,488	245,144	4,344	2%	281,292	285,010	3,719
Total Expenses	161,279	154,999	(6,280)	(4%)	237,964	250,533	(12,570)
Surplus/(Deficit)	88,209	90,145	(1,936)	(2%)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)

Adopted budget - YTD favourable variance in revenue is primarily driven by Grants - Capital (\$2.4 million) and Supplementary Rates (\$1.7 million). YTD unfavourable variance in expenses is due to Net Loss on Disposal of Assets which generate nil proceeds like footpaths, roads, kerb & channel (\$4.0 million) and employee leave provisions (\$2.6 million).

Annual Forecast - The Q3 financial review is projecting a surplus of \$34.5 million, which is an unfavourable movement of \$8.9 million from adopted budget. The Q3 financial review also forecasts an adjusted underlying surplus of \$18.2 million which is \$3.9 million less than adopted budget.

Capital Works Program

YTD - Council has spent \$30.8 million on capital expenditure to 28 February 2026, which is \$15.3 million (33%) less than YTD adopted budget, with \$63.1 million (67.2%) of the full year budget remaining. The variance is driven by underspends in Roads projects (\$5.6 million), Recreational, Leisure & Community Facilities projects (\$3.0 million), Plant, Machinery & Equipment (\$2.1 million), Building Improvements (\$1.4 million) and Buildings (\$1.3 million). This underspend will be ongoing.

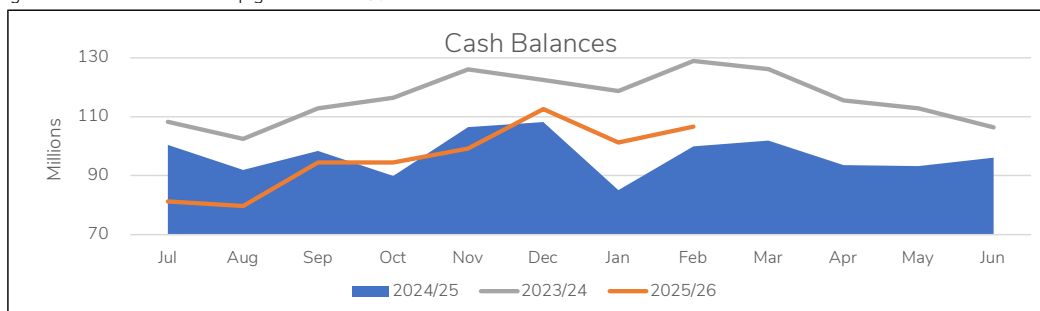
Annual Forecast - The capital works program is forecast to decrease by \$11.2 million from the Q2 forecast of \$80.1 million as a result of \$11.7 million of carry forwards, \$2.0 million of savings and 236 projects requiring additional funding of \$2.4 million.

Financial Results Summary	YTD	YTD	YTD	YTD	Annual Budget	Annual Forecast	Annual Variance
	Actuals	Budget	Variance	Variance			
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	%	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
New asset expenditure	3,143	3,968	825	21%	12,345	8,479	3,867
Asset renewal expenditure	19,546	30,878	11,333	37%	60,648	43,088	17,560
Asset upgrade expenditure	8,087	11,256	3,169	28%	20,894	17,315	3,580
Total capital works expenditure	30,775	46,102	15,326	33%	93,887	68,881	25,006

Cash & Investments

Cash assets are \$106.7 million as at 28 February 2026. This is an increase of \$10.5 million on 30 June 2025 cash levels, mainly as a result of due to the timing of when rates instalments fall due. Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors, mainly due to the timing of when the rates instalments fall due and the delivery of Capital Works projects.

Of the \$106.7 million cash assets, \$80.7 million is convertible to cash in less than 60 days and \$78.0 million (100%) is held in green investments. The portfolio is in compliance with Council policy which requires at least \$20.0 million to be convertible to cash and green investments to make up greater than 70% of all investments.



Operating Performance

Income Statement

YTD Variance (\$)		YTD Variance (%)	
▲	> \$500k	▲	> 10%
■	< \$500k & > (\$500k)	■	< 10% & > (10%)
▼	< (\$500k)	▼	< (10%)

Income Statement	Notes	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	YTD Variance %	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Revenue								
Rates and charges	1	204,192	202,442	▲ 1,751	1%	202,778	204,529	▲ 1,750
Statutory fees and fines	2	13,711	13,191	▲ 521	4%	19,323	19,886	▲ 563
User Fees	3	6,083	5,574	▲ 510	9%	8,899	9,637	▲ 738
Contributions - Monetary	4	5,116	5,685	▼ (569)	(10%)	8,232	8,700	▲ 467
Grants - Operating	5	12,064	13,272	▼ (1,209)	(9%)	21,205	21,741	▲ 536
Grants - Capital	6	2,393	-	▲ 2,393	100%	12,964	11,525	▼ (1,439)
Other Revenue	7	5,901	4,954	▲ 948	19%	7,797	8,901	▲ 1,103
Asset Sales		26	26	■ 0	0%	92	92	■ 0
Total Revenue		249,488	245,144	▲ 4,344	2%	281,292	285,010	▲ 3,719
Expenses								
Employee Benefits	8	78,316	74,797	▼ (3,519)	(5%)	116,144	118,949	▼ (2,805)
Contracts, Materials & Services	9	48,108	47,724	■ (385)	(1%)	73,199	80,439	▼ (7,240)
Depreciation	10	27,227	29,080	▲ 1,854	6%	43,621	41,767	▲ 1,854
Amortisation		240	234	■ (6)	(2%)	236	352	■ (116)
Bad and doubtful debts		2,407	2,141	■ (266)	(12%)	3,153	3,476	■ (323)
Net loss on disposal of assets	11	3,994	-	▼ (3,994)	(100%)	-	3,994	▼ (3,994)
Finance Costs		538	538	■ 0	0%	820	824	■ (4)
Other Expenses		449	485	■ 36	7%	790	733	■ 57
Total Expenses		161,279	154,999	▼ (6,280)	(4%)	237,965	250,533	▼ (12,570)
Net Result		88,209	90,145	▼ (1,936)	(2%)	43,329	34,477	▼ (8,851)

Year to Date Result

Revenue

4. Contributions - Monetary ended \$0.6 million (10%) unfavourable due to lower than anticipated development activity and variable timing of Subdivision Contribution invoices being paid.

6. Grants - Capital ended \$2.4 million (100%) favourable due to timing of recognition of funding for a variety of different capital projects phased for June 2026.

7. Other Revenue ended \$0.9 million (19%) favourable due to earning greater interest from Council's term deposits than budgeted (\$0.5 million) and property lease revenue (\$0.2 million).

Expenses

11. Net loss on disposal of assets ended \$4.0 million (100%) unfavourable due to disposal of assets which generate nil proceeds like footpaths, roads, kerb & channel.

Forecast Year End Result

Revenue

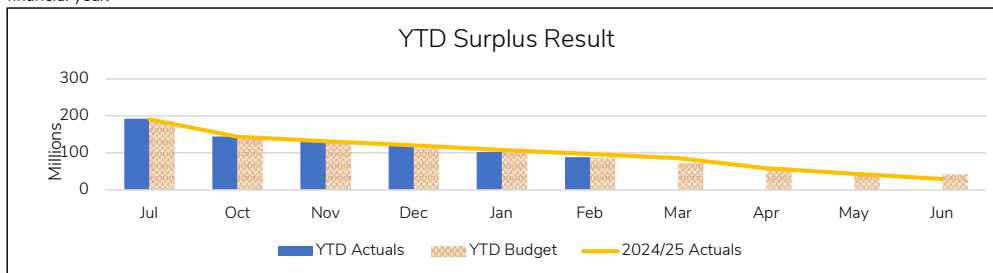
- 1. Rates and Charges** are forecast to increase by \$1.8 million due to greater than anticipated supplementary rating revenue (\$1.6 million).
- 2. Statutory Fees and Fines** are forecast to increase by \$0.6 million primarily due to higher than anticipated parking infringements (\$0.5 million favourable). The annual forecast has been increased by \$0.5 million from the adopted budget and reflects various improvements, including process improvements and the impact of the newly implemented licence plate recognition system.
- 3. User Fees** are forecast to increase by \$0.7 million primarily as a result of an increase in Meals on Wheels (MOWs) with other Councils (\$0.5 million) and also an increase in property valuations (\$0.1 million).
- 6. Grants - Capital** are forecast to decrease by \$1.4 million due to a grant for Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades (\$0.9 million) and a grant for Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade - Wheatsheaf Road (\$0.4 million).
- 7. Other Revenue** are forecast to increase by \$1.1 million primarily as a result of a greater than anticipated investment balance earning interest (\$0.5 million).

Expenses

- 8. Employee Benefits** are forecast to increase by \$2.8 million primarily due to an increase in leave provisions (\$2.0 million) and maternity leave (\$0.5 million).
- 9. Contracts, Materials & Services** are forecast to increase by \$7.2 million primarily due to earlier than anticipated lifecycle project expenditure for Elevate (\$2.5 million) and increased project delivery costs for Coburg Central (\$0.7 million), as well as increased service delivery costs relating to waste collection (\$0.6 million), building maintenance (\$0.5 million) and IT applications (\$0.2 million).
- 10. Depreciation** is forecast to decrease by \$1.9 million due to delays in capital projects being completed resulting in less capitalisations.
- 11. Net Loss on Disposal of Assets** is forecast to increase by \$4.0 million due to the process of disposal of existing assets when they are replaced with new assets.

YTD Operating Result

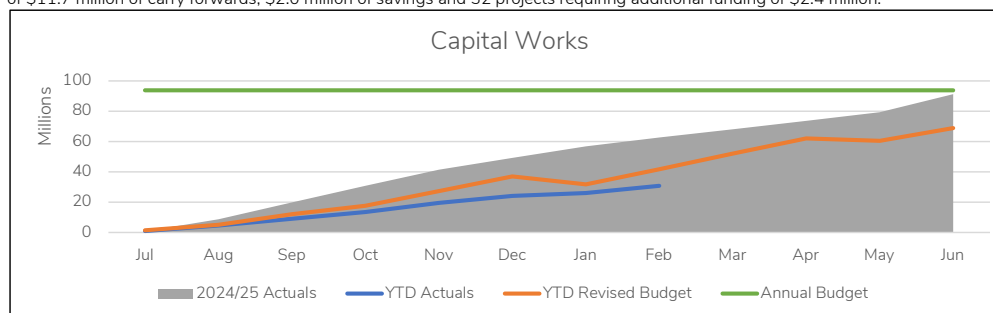
YTD surplus result is impacted by total rates being recognised in July and the surplus will reduce progressively over the course of the financial year.



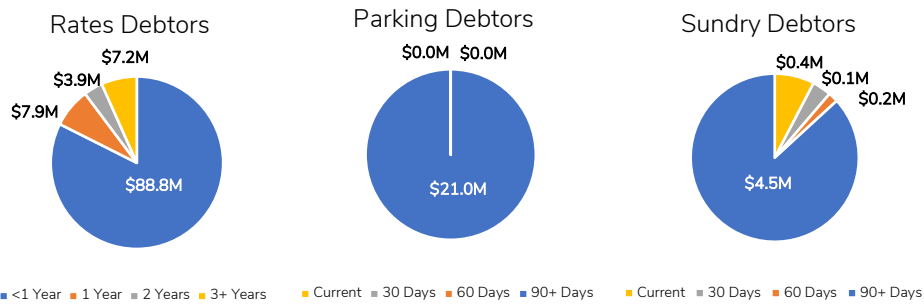
Capital Works

YTD - Council has spent \$30.8 million on capital expenditure to 28 February 2026 which is \$15.3 million (33%) lower than the YTD budget, with \$63.1 million (67%) of the full year budget remaining.

Annual Forecast - The capital works program is forecast to decrease by \$11.2 million from the Q2 forecast of \$80.1 million as a result of \$11.7 million of carry forwards, \$2.0 million of savings and 32 projects requiring additional funding of \$2.4 million.

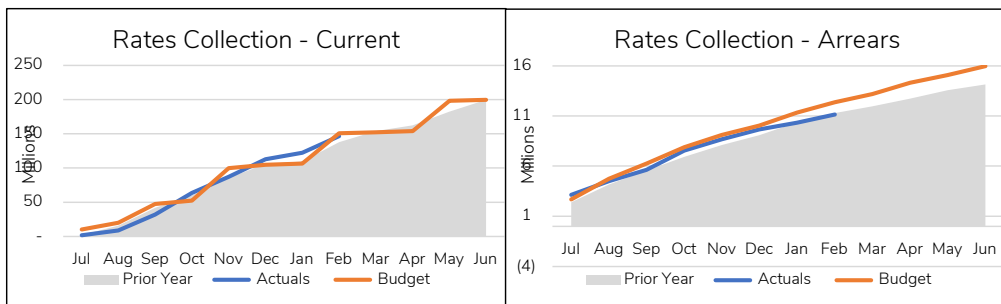


Debtors



Rates Collection

Rates cash collections are on budget and will be monitored over the upcoming months for impact on the forecast cash balances.



Investments

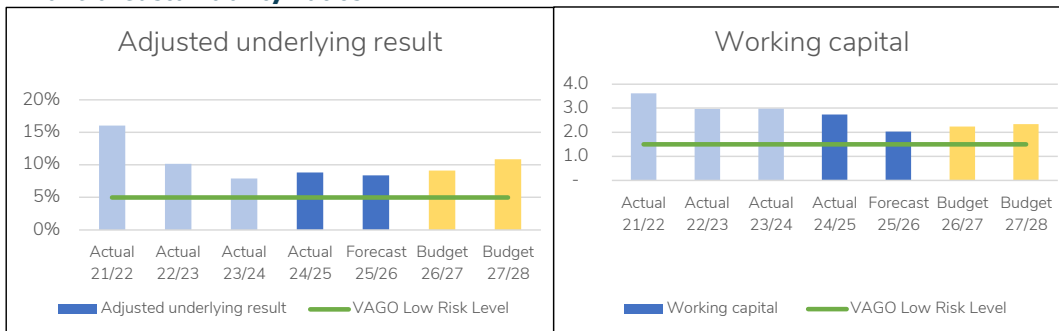
Of the \$106.7 million cash assets, \$80.7 million is convertible to cash in less than 60 days and \$78.0 million (100%) of term deposit investments are held in green investments. The portfolio is in compliance with Council policy which requires at least \$20.0 million to be convertible to cash and green investments to make up greater than 70% of all investments.

Bank	Maturity Date	Green %	Interest Rate %	S & P short term rating	Amount \$'000	Ratio %
Minor Cash*	N/A		N/A	N/A	105	
Westpac	N/A		4.20%	A-1+	18,428	
Westpac	N/A		4.30%	A-1+	10,121	
ME Bank - 2	18/05/2026	100%	4.30%	A-2	5,000	
ME Bank - 2	30/03/2026	100%	4.00%	A-2	5,000	21.8%
ME Bank - 2	18/05/2026	100%	4.30%	A-2	7,000	
Bendigo Bank - 2	23/03/2026	100%	4.00%	A-2	5,000	19.2%
Bendigo Bank - 2	20/05/2026	100%	4.25%	A-2	5,000	
Bendigo Bank - 2	8/04/2026	100%	4.10%	A-2	5,000	
Suncorp - 3	23/03/2026	100%	4.18%	A-1	10,000	12.8%
IMB - 3	8/04/2026	100%	4.10%	A-2	10,000	12.8%
Westpac - 6	27/02/2026	100%	4.14%	A-1+	6,000	
Westpac - 6	10/04/2026	100%	4.17%	A-1+	4,000	
Westpac - 6	4/06/2026	100%	4.32%	A-1+	10,000	33.3%
Westpac - 6	23/06/2026	100%	4.44%	A-1+	6,000	
Total		100%			106,655	100.0%
Green					78,000	100.0%

* Minor cash includes NAB holding account and Petty Cash

Financial Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Ratios

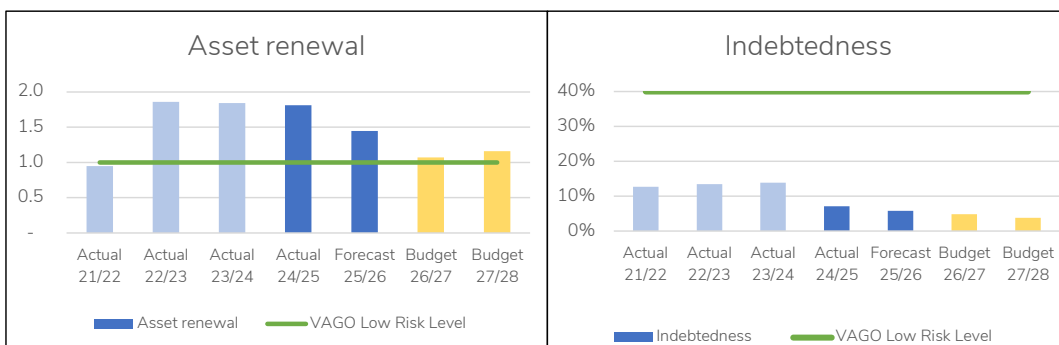


Adjusted underlying surplus (deficit) / adjusted underlying revenue

This ratio measures an entity's ability to generate its own cash. A positive result indicates a surplus, and the larger the percentage, the stronger the result. The result highlights Council's challenges in generating enough cash to fund future capital works without borrowing.

Current assets / current liabilities

Compares current assets to current liabilities, which provides a measure of the ability to pay existing liabilities in the next 12 months. This year's result expected to be in the low-risk range.



Renewal & upgrade spend/ depreciation

Ratios higher than 1.0 indicate that spending on existing assets is faster than the depreciation rate. This year's result is expected to stay in the low-risk range.

Non-current liabilities / own-source revenue

Measures Council's ability to pay the principal and interest on its borrowings as due from the funds it generates. This year's result is expected to stay in the low-risk range.

Treasury Corporation of Victoria (TCV)

TCV loan requirements		Target	Forecast
Interest Cover	EBITDA/Interest Expense	> 2	▲ 90
Interest Bearing Loans	Interest Bearing Liabilities/Own Source Revenue	< 60%	▲ 6%

TCV financing is conditional upon the Council maintaining a sustainable financial position when measured by the interest cover and interest bearing loans ratios. Forecast results indicate that the Council is meeting the minimum requirements. TCV loan requirements are well within target given limited borrowing compared to own source revenue and liability obligations.

Standard Statements

Comprehensive Income Statement

Comprehensive Income Statement	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Revenue						
Rates and charges	204,192	202,442	1,751	202,778	204,529	1,750
Statutory fees and fines	13,711	13,191	521	19,323	19,886	563
User Fees	6,083	5,574	510	8,899	9,637	738
Contributions - Monetary	5,116	5,685	(569)	8,232	8,700	467
Grants - Operating	12,064	13,272	(1,209)	21,205	21,741	536
Grants - Capital	2,393	-	2,393	12,964	11,525	(1,439)
Other Revenue	5,901	4,954	948	7,797	8,901	1,103
Asset Sales	26	26	0	92	92	0
Total Revenue	249,488	245,144	4,344	281,292	285,010	3,719
Expenses						
Employee Benefits	78,316	74,797	(3,519)	116,144	118,949	(2,805)
Contracts, Materials & Services	48,108	47,724	(385)	73,199	80,439	(7,240)
Depreciation	27,227	29,080	1,854	43,621	41,767	1,854
Amortisation	240	234	(6)	236	352	(116)
Bad and doubtful debts	2,407	2,141	(266)	3,153	3,476	(323)
Net loss on disposal of assets	3,994	-	(3,994)	-	3,994	(3,994)
Finance Costs	538	538	0	820	824	(4)
Other Expenses	449	485	36	790	733	57
Total Expenses	161,279	154,999	(6,280)	237,964	250,533	(12,570)
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	88,209	90,145	(1,936)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)

Underlying Result	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Surplus for the Year	88,209	90,145	(1,936)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)
Other Comprehensive Income						
Net asset revaluation	-	-	-	49,206	49,206	-
Total Comprehensive Result	88,209	90,145	(1,936)	92,534	83,683	(8,851)
Non Operating Income and Expenditure						
Net loss on disposal of assets	3,967	(26)	3,994	(92)	3,901	3,994
Contributions Capital (cash & non-monetary)	(141)	(32)	(109)	(32)	(213)	(181)
Grants - Capital	(2,393)	-	(2,393)	(12,964)	(11,525)	1,439
PRRLF Reserve	(4,758)	(5,113)	355	(8,200)	(8,270)	(70)
DCP Reserve	(216)	(213)	(3)	-	(216)	(216)
Net asset revaluation	-	-	-	(49,206)	(49,206)	-
Total Capital Income	(3,542)	(5,385)	1,843	(21,289)	(16,324)	4,965
Underlying Result	84,667	84,760	(94)	22,040	18,154	(3,886)
Less						
Loan Principal Repayments	1,395	1,395	-	14,212	14,209	3
Additional Rates Funded CAPEX	(7,613)	(7,613)	-	13,041	(11,420)	24,461
Transfers to Reserves - Operating	216	5,189	4,972	7,783	7,783	(0)
Transfers from Reserves - Operating	-	-	-	(13,500)	(16,640)	3,140
Carry Forwards processed into FY27	23,737	23,737	-	-	23,737	(23,737)
Total Transfers & Other	17,736	22,708	4,972	21,536	17,669	3,867
Unrestricted Surplus/(Deficit)	66,930	62,052	4,879	504	484	(19)

Statement of Financial Position

Statement of Financial Position	YTD Actuals \$'000	30/06/25 Actuals \$'000	Movement Inc/(Dec) \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Current assets						
Cash and cash equivalents	28,655	36,116	(7,462)	89	24,108	24,019
Trade and other receivables	118,676	41,679	76,997	45,793	45,891	99
Other financial assets	82,000	60,000	22,000	73,107	67,607	(5,500)
Inventories	690	690	-	659	659	-
Prepayments	3,753	3,160	593	2,429	2,429	-
Non-current assets classified as held for sale	25,153	22,975	2,178	-	-	-
Other assets	4,704	4,156	548	2,208	2,208	-
Total current assets	263,630	168,776	94,854	124,284	142,902	18,618
Non-current assets						
Unlisted Shares	2	2	-	2	2	-
Property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	2,632,319	2,635,161	(2,842)	2,983,191	2,956,045	(27,146)
Right-of-use assets	730	813	-	128	128	-
Investments	37,232	37,232	-	36,024	36,024	-
Total non-current assets	2,670,283	2,673,207	(2,842)	3,019,345	2,992,199	(27,146)
Total assets	2,933,913	2,841,983	92,012	3,143,629	3,135,101	(8,528)
Current liabilities						
Payables						
Payables	26,589	20,543	6,046	18,753	18,753	-
Revenue Received in Advance	4,011	2,302	1,709	6,898	6,898	-
Provisions	21,963	20,923	1,039	27,110	27,433	323
Interest Bearing Loans and Borrowings	14,209	14,209	-	2,172	2,172	-
Trust Funds & Deposits	1,130	5,822	(4,692)	6,384	6,384	-
Lease liabilities	50	121	(71)	-	-	-
Total current liabilities	67,952	63,920	4,032	61,318	61,640	323
Non-current liabilities						
Provisions	2,872	2,510	362	2,603	2,603	-
Interest-bearing liabilities	12,271	12,961	(690)	11,437	11,437	-
Lease liabilities	464	457	8	-	-	-
Trust Funds & Deposits	706	706	-	-	-	-
Total non-current liabilities	16,312	16,633	(321)	14,040	14,040	-
Total liabilities	84,264	80,554	3,711	75,358	75,681	323
Net assets	2,849,648	2,761,430	88,219	3,068,272	3,059,421	(8,851)
Equity						
Asset revaluation reserves	1,871,464	1,871,459	6	-	-	-
Other reserves	51,016	66,701	(15,684)	2,151,921	2,172,986	21,065
Accumulated surplus	927,168	823,270	103,898	916,351	886,435	(29,916)
Total equity	2,849,648	2,761,430	88,219	3,068,272	3,059,421	(8,851)

Statement of Cashflows

Statement of Cash Flows	YTD	Annual	Annual	Annual
	Actuals	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
	Inflows	Inflows	Inflows	Inflows
	(Outflows)	(Outflows)	(Outflows)	(Outflows)
Cash flows from operating activities				
Rates and charges	124,176	199,737	201,399	1,663
Statutory fees and fines	11,589	18,357	18,908	552
User fees	4,300	8,721	9,459	738
Grants - operating	12,064	21,205	21,741	536
Grants - capital	4,102	12,964	11,525	(1,439)
Contributions - monetary	5,123	8,232	8,700	467
Interest received	3,515	-	879	879
Trust funds and deposits taken	36,049	41,524	41,524	-
Other receipts	4,297	7,797	8,021	224
Net GST refund/(payment)	987	-	-	-
Payments to Employees	(79,614)	(113,670)	(116,475)	(2,805)
Payments to Suppliers	(54,840)	(73,167)	(80,407)	(7,240)
Trust funds and deposits repaid	(24,792)	(41,414)	(41,414)	-
Other payments	(490)	(790)	(733)	57
Net cash (used in) / provided by operating activities	46,466	89,497	83,129	(6,368)
Cash flows from investing activities				
Payments for property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	(30,293)	(93,886)	(68,880)	25,006
Proceeds from sale of property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	364	92	92	0
Payments/(Proceeds) for investments	(22,000)	4,993	4,993	-
Net cash used in investing activities	(51,929)	(88,801)	(63,795)	25,006
Cash flows from financing activities				
Finance costs	(531)	(816)	(820)	(4)
Repayment of borrowings	(1,396)	(14,212)	(14,209)	3
Interest paid - lease liability	(8)	-	-	-
Repayment of lease liabilities	(63)	(20)	(20)	-
Net cash used in financing activities	(1,998)	(15,048)	(15,049)	(1)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held	(7,462)	(14,352)	4,285	18,638
Cash at beginning of period	36,116	14,441	36,116	21,675
Cash at end of period	28,655	89	40,402	40,313
Cash Position				
Non-restricted Cash at 1 July 2025	36,116	14,441	36,116	21,675
Other Financial Assets at 1 July 2025	60,000	78,100	60,000	(18,100)
Cash & cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	96,116	92,541	96,116	3,575
Non-restricted Cash at end of financial period	28,655	89	24,108	24,019
Other Financial Assets at end of financial period	82,000	73,107	67,607	(5,500)
Cash & cash equivalents at end of financial period	110,655	73,196	91,715	18,519

Statement of Capital Works

Statement of Capital Works	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Property						
Land	2	-	(2)	-	-	-
Buildings	1,920	3,175	1,255	8,910	3,919	4,991
Building Improvements	2,394	3,805	1,411	7,535	6,966	569
Total property	4,316	6,980	2,664	16,445	10,885	5,560
Plant and equipment						
Plant, machinery and equipment	1,109	3,212	2,103	5,877	3,324	2,553
Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture	40	91	51	171	176	(4)
Computers and telecommunications	554	730	176	1,125	1,113	12
Artworks	25	47	21	47	131	(84)
Library books	661	745	84	1,082	1,082	0
Total plant and equipment	2,389	4,825	2,436	8,302	5,825	2,477
Infrastructure						
Roads	9,847	15,465	5,619	27,223	23,616	3,607
Bridges	139	438	299	3,334	339	2,995
Footpaths and cycleways	2,509	3,005	496	6,662	5,045	1,617
Drainage	988	1,482	494	2,946	1,461	1,485
Recreational, leisure & community facilities	3,916	6,971	3,055	14,025	9,972	4,053
Waste management	172	230	58	2,183	269	1,914
Parks, open space and streetscapes	6,499	6,705	206	12,767	11,469	1,298
Total infrastructure	24,070	34,297	10,226	69,140	52,171	16,969
Total capital works expenditure	30,775	46,102	15,326	93,887	68,881	25,006
Represented by:						
New asset expenditure	3,143	3,968	825	12,345	8,479	3,867
Asset renewal expenditure	19,546	30,878	11,333	60,648	43,088	17,560
Asset upgrade expenditure	8,087	11,256	3,169	20,894	17,315	3,580
Total capital works expenditure	30,775	46,102	15,326	93,887	68,881	25,006

Procurement reporting

Contracts approved under delegation

This includes a listing of all of the contracts entered under delegation for the month of February.

Contract Description	Contract	Start date	Delegation	Total Contract (excluding GST)
Refurbishment - 482 Victoria St., Brunswick West	RFQ-2025-66	12/02/2026	Manager	\$183,285.00
Home Energy Subsidy Program - Solar Retailer Services	EXE-2025-61	17/02/2026	CEO	\$660,000.00

Capital Works Program - 2025-26 Q3 Financial Review

Capital Works Program	\$'000
Adopted budget	93,887
Plus	
Additional carry forwards from 2024-25	8,366
Plus	
Q1 variations	625
Plus	
Q2 variations	(22,824)
Plus	
Q3 variations	(11,174)
Q3 forecast	68,881

Q3 Variations	\$'000
New projects requiring funding	758
Existing projects requiring additional funding	1,405
Projects requiring a bring forward from 2026-27	137
Project savings	(1,728)
Projects requiring a carry forward into 2026-27	(11,745)
Q3 variations	(11,174)

New projects requiring funding

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Additional Funding \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Merri Creek Trail Realignment - Bowden Reserve	-	300,000	300,000			300,000
Oak Park Pool - Blanket Replacement	-	180,000	180,000			180,000
Stormwater Rectification	-	110,000	110,000			110,000
Coburg Leisure Centre - Locker Replacement	-	70,000	70,000			70,000
Council Chambers Artwork Restoration	-	50,000	50,000			50,000
ATC Cook Reserve - Off-street Carpark	-	25,000	25,000			25,000
Body Worn Cameras & Radios	-	23,039	23,039			23,039
Total	-	758,039	758,039	-	-	758,039

Existing projects requiring additional funding

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Additional Funding \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Allard Park Sportsfield Redevelopment	2,300,000	329,459	2,629,459			329,459
Forward Road Design	460,000	224,645	684,645			224,645
Road Reconstruction, Devon Street From View To Oak	876,600	221,493	1,098,093			221,493
Road Reconstruction, Jersey St From Ohea To Gaffney - Both Carriageways	868,050	89,000	957,050			89,000
Road Reconstruction, Fowler Street From Walsh To Dead End	300,702	70,274	370,976			70,274
Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program	919,760	64,000	983,760			64,000
Minor Park - Tate Reserve (Removal) ¹	33,768	50,903	84,671			50,903
Brunswick Early Years Hub	266,163	50,691	316,854			50,691
York Street Park Close to Home ²	1,187,609	43,387	1,230,996			43,387
Business Transformation - mobile phone purchases	1,715	41,625	43,339			41,625
Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project	6,617	32,034	38,651	32,034		
Shore Reserve - Football & Cricket	2,099,410	30,000	2,129,410			30,000
Victoria Street Brunswick West MCHC	164,099	27,979	192,078			27,979
City Infrastructure - mobile phone purchases	2,430	20,317	22,747			20,317
Municipal Art Collection	38,865	18,000	56,865			18,000
Glenroy College - Open Space	30,000	10,000	40,000			10,000
Gowanbrae Dog Park	394,888	9,624	404,512			9,624
Road Reconstruction, Herbert Street From Pascoe Vale To Dead End	218,366	5,599	223,965			5,599
Community - mobile phone purchases	7,765	4,679	12,444			4,679
Place & Environment - mobile phone purchases	3,498	2,772	6,270			2,772
Public Art Program Across Merri-bek	22,335	1,369	23,704			1,369
Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal	89,099	783	89,882			783
Funded from previously approved carry forward						
Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades	879,036	31,500	910,536	31,500		
Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment	121,961	18,681	140,642	18,681		
Fawkner Transport Study Projects	64,026	5,763	69,789			5,763
Total	11,356,763	1,404,577	12,761,339	82,215	-	1,322,362

(1) Project also includes the re-allocation of Project Management budget (\$2,104), bringing the Q3 forecast to \$86,774.

(2) Project also includes the re-allocation of Project Management budget (\$6,201), bringing the Q3 forecast to \$1,237,197.

Projects requiring a bring forward

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Bring Forward \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Bring forwards from 2026-27						
ATC Cook Reserve (Design) ¹	120,227	50,000	170,227		50,000	
Park Renewal, Morris Reserve (Design and Construct) ²	65,602	50,000	115,602		50,000	
Native Understorey Planting	50,000	37,488	87,488			37,488
Total	235,830	137,488	373,318	-	100,000	37,488

(1) Project also includes the re-allocation of Project Management budget (\$2,719), bringing the Q3 forecast to \$172,946.

(2) Project also includes the re-allocation of Project Management budget (\$1,822), bringing the Q3 forecast to \$117,424.

Projects with savings

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Savings \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd From Arndt To Crowley	931,878	(757,571)	174,307			(757,571)
Road Reconstruction, Grandview Ave From Brearley To Princes	841,546	(231,657)	609,889			(231,657)
Road Reconstruction, Baxter Street From Sydney Kerb Line To Railway Kerb Line	813,050	(197,676)	615,374			(197,676)
Alva Gr from Urquhart to Bell, Road Reconstruction	338,661	(189,683)	148,978			(189,683)
Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin ¹	411,800	(100,000)	311,800			(100,000)
Kent Road - Separated Bike Lane Trial	398,434	(87,585)	310,849			(87,585)
Hosken Reserve Stage 3 Football Pitches	126,311	(66,181)	60,130			(66,181)
De Carle Street from Donald to Davies Road Reconstruction	121,139	(53,108)	68,031			(53,108)
Baffe Parks Sports Field Lights	65,515	(44,550)	20,965			(44,550)
Batman Avenue Shared Path - Upfield Shared Path	51,075	(305)	50,770			(305)
Total	4,099,410	(1,728,316)	2,371,094	-	-	(1,728,316)

(1) Project also has a carry forward into 2026-27 of \$150,000, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$161,800.

Re-allocation of Project Management budget

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Net Change to Budget \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Parks, Playground and Reserve Renewal and Improvement	177,958	(31,522)	146,437			(31,522)
York Street Park Close to Home ¹	1,187,609	6,201	1,193,810			6,201
ATC Cook Reserve (Design) ²	120,227	2,719	122,946			2,719
Park Renewal, Dowd Reserve, including playground upgrade	329,071	2,541	331,612			2,541
Park Renewal, Loyola Ave Pitt St (Design, Construct and Road Closure)	50,000	2,440	52,440			2,440
Park Renewal, James Reserve (Design and Road Closure)	80,000	2,440	82,440			2,440
Park Renewal - Gervase Reserve	349,408	2,420	351,827			2,420
Park Renewal, Ivan Page Reserve (Design and Construct)	339,647	2,420	342,067			2,420
Park Renewal - Sewell Reserve	467,277	2,420	469,697			2,420
Park Renewal - McCleery Reserve	285,457	2,104	287,560			2,104
Minor Park - Tate Reserve (Removal) ³	33,768	2,104	35,871			2,104
Park Renewal, Morris Reserve (Design and Construct) ⁴	65,602	1,822	67,424			1,822
Park Renewal, Volga Street/Middle Street (Design) ⁵	103,012	797	103,809			797
Improving Gilpin Dog Park	161,012	797	161,809			797
Half Court Basketball Ring in Glenroy	50,445	299	50,744			299
Total	3,800,492	0	3,800,492	-	-	0

(1) Project also requires additional funding of \$43,387, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$1,237,197.

(2) Project also requires a bring forward of \$50,000, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$172,946.

(3) Project also requires additional funding of \$50,903, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$86,774.

(4) Project also requires a bring forward of \$50,000, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$117,424.

(5) Project also has a carry forward into 2026-27 of \$100,000, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$3,809.

Reverse duplicated budget variation

Project	Q2 Forecast \$	Net Change to Budget \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Wombat Crossings - Barrow St & Blair St, Coburg	586,095	(200,000)	386,095			(200,000)
Planning, Design and Evaluation of Transport Projects	560,956	150,000	710,956			150,000
School Active Travel and Safety Infrastructure	100,000	50,000	150,000			50,000
Total	1,247,051	-	1,247,051	-	-	-

Carry Forwards into 2026-27	\$
Q1 forecast	5,815,264
Q2 forecast	20,872,554
Q3 forecast - changes to previously approved carry forwards	(140,528)
Q3 forecast - new carry forward requests	11,745,362
Total carry forwards	38,292,652

New capital carry forwards into 2026-27

Project and Delay Reason	Expected Completion Date	Q2 Forecast \$	Carry Forward \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
<u>Dunstan Reserve Childcare</u> Due to multiple delays, the project is unable to be completed this financial year.	Sep-2026	3,412,511	(1,600,000)	1,812,511			(1,600,000)
<u>Oak Park Sports and Aquatic - Electrification</u> Project is now expected to be completed in September 2026 after receiving estimated claim projections.	Sep-2026	1,812,516	(1,293,194)	519,322	(331,131)		(962,063)
<u>Heavy Vehicles Replacement Program</u> Council's heavy vehicle procurement process has been reviewed causing some procurement delays.	Jun-2027	2,040,000	(1,270,000)	770,000			(1,270,000)
<u>Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade - Wheatsheaf Rd</u> Construction delayed due to Department of Transport and Planning approvals.	Nov-2026	1,300,000	(917,861)	382,139	(629,603)		(288,258)
<u>Wheeler Street - Retaining Wall</u> Potential carry forward as tender process has not commenced.	Mar-2027	920,000	(915,000)	5,000			(915,000)
<u>Mitchell Parade Retaining Walls</u> Construction has been delayed due to certain legal issues that needed to be resolved before the contract could be signed with the contractor. As a result, the booking of the piling subcontractor was also delayed.	Aug-2026	2,184,912	(828,947)	1,355,965	(712,887)		(116,060)
<u>Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek</u> Construction is now expected to start next financial year.	Jun-2029	946,277	(780,000)	166,277	(780,000)		
<u>Road Reconstruction, OHea Street From Lonsdale St to Clifton Grove</u> Construction is planned to start in April 2026 and is now expected to be completed next financial year.	Dec-2026	935,315	(700,000)	235,315			(700,000)
<u>Light Vehicles Replacement Program</u> Delay due to ongoing specification development with operational units, unresolved risk considerations for Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) deployment (including range limitations and depot energy supply), and the need to further assess suitable transition technologies such as plug-in hybrids for operational requirements.	Sep-2026	1,404,983	(666,603)	738,380			(666,603)
<u>Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd From Crowley To Rhodes</u> This section needs to start after the completion of two projects, Devon Street and Northumberland Road (Fawkner to Longview) to minimise impact on road users and residents.	Sep-2026	600,985	(600,000)	985			(600,000)
<u>Balam Balam Place North West Building - Phoenix Street</u> Project changes as per Council resolution.	Dec-2026	329,225	(289,118)	40,107		(139,118)	(150,000)
<u>Drainage, Moama Crescent And Jhonson Street - Hot Spot No 21</u> Project commencement delayed pending completion and approval of the Planning Permit, Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP), and Asbestos Management Plan.	Dec-2026	531,650	(266,650)	265,000			(266,650)
<u>Electricity Capacity Upgrades at Hadfield Depot</u> Project delayed due to revised Jemena offer. Jemena offer not yet received. Construction is now scheduled to start June/July 2026.	Dec-2026	779,690	(200,000)	579,690			(200,000)
<u>McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Social Room Amenities & Kitchen</u> Project is slightly delayed and all works are expected to be completed by mid to late July.	Jul-2026	431,678	(200,000)	231,678			(200,000)

New capital carry forwards into 2026-27 cont.

Project and Delay Reason	Expected Completion Date	Q2 Forecast \$	Carry Forward \$	Q3 Forecast \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Footpath & Bikepath Renewals							
An amount of \$200,000 has been carried forward due to resource constraints that prevented completion of the planned activities within the financial year.	TBA	1,940,000	(200,000)	1,740,000			(200,000)
Wombat Crossing - West Street							
The current budget is split across 2025-26 and 2026-27, however given the project is expected to be tendered in April/May 2026, it is likely the majority of works will be completed after 30 June 2026.	Sep-2026	300,000	(200,000)	100,000			(200,000)
Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin¹							
Due to internal resourcing it is possible that we won't be able to tender for the concrete path works. We may either have to split up the works package to deliver it in stages or tender it in one, but that may extend past 2025-26.	Sep-2026	411,800	(150,000)	261,800			(150,000)
Holbrook Reserve Pavilion and Gender Inclusive Change Rooms							
Carry forward due to power upgrade offer issue with Citipower extending over next 12 months. Power supply offer cost currently unknown as it may only be provided in next financial year.	Jun-2027	1,773,880	(139,538)	1,634,342			(139,538)
Park Renewal, Volga Street/Middle Street (Design)²							
Proposed works for this financial year will not be completed in this financial year.	Jun-2027	103,012	(100,000)	3,012		(100,000)	
Glenroy Movement and Place Plan							
Movement and place plan deferred to mid 2026 due to internal resourcing and places for people. Estimated delivery in the first half of 2026-27.	Dec-2027	80,000	(80,000)	-			(80,000)
Park Renewal, Calder Reserve (Design and Construct)							
Project has been delayed due to internal resourcing. Further delay up to 20 weeks with power authority advice to conduct early works.	Dec-2027	69,400	(52,700)	16,700		(52,700)	
Mcbryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Pavillion Gender Inclusive Facilities							
Project is slightly delayed and all works are expected to be completed by mid to late July.	Jul-2026	2,534,097	(50,000)	2,484,097			(50,000)
Corporate Carbon Reduction							
There is a risk the Hadfield Operations Centre solar photovoltaic project will be initiated but not fully completed this financial year.	Jul-2026	280,000	(50,000)	230,000			(50,000)
Park Renewal, Gordon St - Minor Works							
Landscape Architect has just been appointed which has delayed the delivery of the project. New timeline is start initial project scoping in May/June 2026, completion in October 2026	Oct-2026	50,000	(50,000)	-		(50,000)	
Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide							
The project delivery is currently on hold due to not receiving the necessary access license from the private property owners.	Dec-2026	119,439	(47,291)	72,148			(47,291)
Coburg Library and Piazza Redevelopment							
Request carry forward of \$40,000 as public engagement setback until March 2026 for six weeks, therefore concept design finalisation expected by first month of next financial year.	Jul-2026	750,000	(40,000)	710,000		(40,000)	
Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment							
Design commenced but consultation was delayed due to resourcing constraints. Project will now be delivered in 2026-27	Jun-2027	30,000	(30,000)	-			(30,000)
DeChene Reserve - Gender Inclusive Facilities							
Carry forward reflects delay in program due to inadequate project scoping, additional completion date of Moomba Pavilion (the soccer club's temporary home during construction works at De Chene).	Sep-2027	127,225	(28,460)	98,765			(28,460)
Total		26,198,593	(11,745,362)	14,453,231	(2,453,621)	(381,818)	(8,909,923)

(1) Project also has savings of \$100,000, bringing the Q3 forecast to \$161,800.

(2) Project also includes the re-allocation of Project Management budget (\$797), bringing the Q3 forecast to \$3,809.

Changes to carry forwards into 2026-27 previously approved

Project	Previously Approved \$	Adjustment \$	New Carry Forward \$	Grants \$	Reserves \$	Council \$
Adjustments due to spend now expected to occur in 2025-26						
Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades	813,421	(31,500)	781,921	(31,500)		
Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment	675,662	(18,681)	656,981	(18,681)		
Fawkner Transport Study Projects	236,486	(5,763)	230,723			(5,763)
Adjustments due to budget now declared as savings						
Carelink Go+ Device Purchases	59,584	(59,584)	-			(59,584)
Parks and Reserve Flooding Rectification	200,000	(25,000)	175,000		(25,000)	
Total	1,985,153	(140,528)	1,844,625	(50,181)	(25,000)	(65,347)

7.9 GOVERNANCE REPORT - APRIL 2026 - CYCLICAL REPORT

Acting Director Business Transformation, Anita Curnow

Governance and Strategy

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the summary of minutes from the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee held 24 February 2026, at Attachment 1 to this report.
2. Notes the Records of Meetings, at Attachment 2 to this report.
3. Notes responses to questions taken on notice during Public Question Time at the 12 November 2025, 10 December 2025 and 11 March 2026 Council meetings, provided at Attachment 3 to this report.
4. Notes the summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 3 March 2026 at Attachment 4 to this report.
5. Notes the Strategic Risk Review.
6. Notes Mayor, Cr Abboud's report on attendance at an approved activity, Fast Track 2026 Incivility: a threat to local democracy.
7. Adopts the Public Interest Disclosure Policy at Attachment 5 to this report.
8. Appoints Cr Politis to the Older Persons Reference Group as an additional Councillor appointee for the remainder of 2025/26 Mayoral year.
9. Approves a temporary update for a period of six months to the Instrument of Delegation from Council to the Chief Executive Officer to temporarily increase the contract variation threshold from 5% to 15% as a contingency measure in response to the current economic environment.
10. In the exercise of the powers conferred by section 11 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and the other legislation referred to in the attached Instrument of Delegation, delegates to the person holding the position, or acting in or performing the duties, of Chief Executive Officer the powers, duties and functions set out in the Instrument of Delegation to the Chief Executive Officer, provided as Attachment 6 to this report, subject to the conditions and limitations specified in that Instrument and determines:
 - a) The instrument comes into force immediately when signed by the Chief Executive Officer and Mayor.
 - b) On the coming into force of the instrument the previous delegation to the Chief Executive Officer adopted 9 July 2025 is revoked.
 - c) The duties and functions set out in the instrument must be performed, and the powers set out in the instruments must be executed, in accordance with any guidelines or policies of Council that it may from time to time adopt.
11. Receives a report at its October 2026 Council meeting to review the Instrument of Delegation from Council to the Chief Executive Officer.

REPORT

Executive Summary

The Governance report is prepared as a monthly standing report to Council which provides a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

This Governance report includes:

- A summary of the minutes of Advisory Committees and Groups.
- Records of Meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the records.
- Responses to Public Question Time items taken on notice at the 12 November 2025, 10 December 2025 and 11 March 2026 Council meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the responses.
- The summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 3 March 2026.
- The annual Strategic Risk Review.
- A report from Mayor, Cr Abboud on attendance at an approved activity, Fast Track 2026 Incivility: a threat to local democracy.
- A recommendation to adopt the Public Interest Disclosures Policy, as reviewed.
- A recommendation that Council approve the additional appointment of Councillor Politis to the Older Persons Reference Group.
- Recommendations relating to the Instrument of Delegation from Council to the Chief Executive Officer, increasing the current contract variation threshold from 5% to 15% as a contingency measure in response to the current economic environment. This adjustment will provide flexibility to manage cost fluctuations and support the continued delivery of services and capital works projects during this period of economic uncertainty. It is proposed that this change be in place for six months, with Council receiving a further report at its October 2026 meeting to review.

Previous Council Decisions

Public Interest Disclosure Policy – 6 December 2023

That Council adopts the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowers) Policy.

Governance Report – December 2025 – Cyclical Report – 10 December 2025

That Council:

...

8. *Appoints Councillors to advisory committees and reference groups for the 2025/26 Mayoral year as follows and amend the Terms of Reference for the Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee to permit two Councillor representatives under its membership.*

Advisory Committees	
<i>Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee</i>	<i>Cr Iwasaki</i>
<i>Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee</i>	<i>Cr Iwasaki</i>
<i>First Peoples Advisory Committee</i>	<i>Cr Bolton (co-Chair)</i>
<i>Liveability Advisory Committee</i>	<i>Cr Irvin</i>
<i>Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee</i>	<i>Cr Svensson Cr Theodosis</i>
Reference Groups	
<i>Strategic Transport Reference Group</i>	<i>Cr Irvin</i>
<i>Older Persons Reference Group</i>	<i>Cr Abboud</i>
<i>Disability Reference Group</i>	<i>Cr Bolton</i>
<i>Gender Equality Reference Group</i>	<i>Cr Theodosis</i>

...

Statutory Review of Instruments of Delegation from Council – 9 July 2025*That Council:*

1. *In the exercise of the powers conferred by section 11 of the Local Government Act 2020 and the other legislation referred to in the attached Instruments of Delegation, delegates to the person holding the position, or acting in or performing the duties, of Chief Executive Officer the powers, duties and functions set out in the Instrument of Delegation to the Chief Executive Officer, provided as Attachment 1 to this report, subject to the conditions and limitations specified in that Instrument and determines:*
 - a) *The instrument comes into force immediately the common seal of Council is affixed to the instrument.*
 - b) *On the coming into force of the instrument the previous delegation to the Chief Executive Officer adopted 13 October 2021 is revoked.*
 - c) *The duties and functions set out in the instrument must be performed, and the powers set out in the instruments must be executed, in accordance with any guidelines or policies of Council that it may from time to time adopt.*

...

1. Policy Context

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) and the Governance Rules set out the requirements for keeping and reporting records of meetings held under the auspices of Council.

Council's Governance Rules contains provisions which enable the Chairperson to take a question On Notice, with a considered written response being provided to the questioner, in circumstances including where the question requires information that is either not available or accessible at the time of that meeting, or where the time allowed for Public Question Time has elapsed.

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy states that Councillors attending any approved activity must provide all Councillors with a verbal or written report on their attendance. The report must be submitted to a Council meeting as soon as practicable.

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* and *Aged Care Act 2024* provides the regime for disclosing and investigating corrupt and improper conduct.

Section 11 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and the other legislation referred to in **Attachment 6** sets out the Power of Delegation and that a Council may by Instrument of Delegation delegate any power, duty, function under this Act or any other Act other than a power, duty or function specified.

2. Background

The Governance Report is prepared as a monthly report to Council to provide a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

In accordance with best practice principles and good governance practice, and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Act, this report incorporates matters including reporting of Advisory Committees, records of meetings held under the auspice of Council, items relating to the delegation of Council powers and duties, and policy and strategy reporting.

3. Issues

Advisory Committee minutes

A summary of the minutes of the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee held 24 February 2026 is provided at **Attachment 1** for Council's information.

Records of Meetings held under the auspice of Council

Records of matters discussed at meetings organised or hosted by Merri-bek that involve Councillors and Council officers are kept in accordance with the Governance Rules.

Meeting Records must include meeting attendees, including organisations represented by external presenters; the title of matters discussed; and any conflicts of interests disclosed and whether the declarant of a conflict of interests recused themselves from the meeting.

Some examples include Councillor Briefings, meetings with residents/developers/clients/organisations/Government departments/statutory authorities and consultations.

Records of Meetings received since the previous Council Meeting are presented at **Attachment 2** as follows:

- Councillor Briefing – 10 March 2026
- Councillor Workshop – 14 and 15 March 2026
- Councillor Briefing – 16 March 2026
- Planning Briefing – 23 March 2026
- Councillor Briefing – 30 March 2026

Responses to Questions taken On Notice at Council meetings

At Council Meetings, questions are taken On Notice during Public Question Time, where persons submitting questions are not in attendance or where the maximum allowable time for public questions has elapsed.

Questions taken On Notice are provided with a written response following the meeting for which they are submitted and reported to Council at the next practicable meeting. The questions are recorded in the meeting minutes.

The responses to questions taken On Notice at **Attachment 3** to this report relate to questions from 12 November 2025, 10 December 2025 and 11 March Council meetings regarding:

- O'Hea Street bike lane extension
- Council funding for food relief charities
- Council funding for religious faith groups
- Footpaths
- Amenity at bus stops

Audit and Risk Committee minutes

A summary of the minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held 3 March 2026 is provided at **Attachment 4**.

The summary is provided in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee Charter, the Governance Rules 2023, public transparency principles and governance principles in the *Local Government Act 2020*. The Audit and Risk Committee Charter is publicly available on Council's website.

Strategic Risks

Council faces a range of strategic risks that could affect community wellbeing, the environment, financial stability and the delivery of essential services.

Council currently has 9 strategic risks that consist of 3 high, 5 medium, and 1 low-rated risk. A recent review confirmed that the risk controls in place across each strategic risk remain effective, and Council officers are continuing to monitor and progress risk treatments to further strengthen the management of Council's strategic risks.

The table presents Council's key strategic risks, organised by Directorate, and shows the level of risk that remains after existing controls have been applied (referred to as "residual risk").

Risk Description	Residual Likelihood	Residual Consequences	Residual Risk Rating (with controls in place)
Directorate: Business Transformation			
Council's cyber security is breached	Possible	Major	High
Council does not properly plan or prepare for disruption, change and transformation	Possible	Moderate	Medium
Council's financial sustainability is not maintained	Unlikely	Major	Medium
Failure to attract and retain a skilled and competent workforce	Unlikely	Minor	Low
Directorate: Place and Environment			
The impacts of climate change, including physical and transition risks, are not appropriately planned for or responded to	Likely	Major	High
The impacts of population growth are not effectively managed	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium
Directorate: City Infrastructure			
Council's assets or infrastructure become unfit for purpose	Possible	Moderate	Medium
Directorate: Community			
Ineffective management of stakeholder relationships	Likely	Moderate	High
Ineffective management of Council's reputation and brand	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium

Report from Mayor, Cr Abboud on attendance at an approved activity - Fast Track 2026 Incivility: a threat to local democracy

The event was training to help us understand and respond to the growing issue of incivility in local government. We heard about the threat to trusting and respectful relationships and the impact that eroding of same has on people's emotional wellbeing and capability to deliver in our roles.

Public Interest Disclosures Policy Review

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* establishes the framework for the disclosure and investigation of corrupt and improper conduct relating to public bodies and public officers. The legislation also provides protections for individuals who make disclosures (whistleblowers).

The Public Interest Disclosure Policy was updated in December 2023, however new whistleblower protections introduced under the *Aged Care Act 2024*, have prompted an early review of the policy.

The *Aged Care Act 2024* introduced significant reforms to whistleblower protections to ensure that aged care workers, as well as older people, their families, and carers, can raise concerns or report information without fear of unfair treatment or reprisal.

The amended policy, as proposed in **Attachment 5** to this report, outlines Council's commitment to fostering an ethical and transparent culture and highlights the value placed on the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing within the organisation so that such matters can be appropriately assessed and investigated.

The proposed amendments to the Public Interest Disclosures Policy are minor and administrative in nature and are outlined below:

- 2. Context - The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission has been included as an authorised agency for receiving and managing public interest disclosures.
- 4. Policy Details - The *Aged Care Act 2024* has been referenced.
- 6.1 Management of Disclosures – Updated to specify the appropriate agencies to whom disclosures relating to aged care may be directed
- 7. Legislation - Reference to the *Aged Care Act 2024* has been referenced.
- 8. Roles and Responsibilities – Aged and Community Support staff have been added as a designated responsibility, and the Public Interest Disclosure Welfare Officer role has been removed, as this position is no longer in place.
- 10. Definitions – Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission added as an Investigating Entity
- 11. Associated Documents – Policy titles updated.

Councillor appointment to Older Persons Reference Group

At its meeting held 10 December 2025, Council appointed Councillors to the roles of 'Councillor Responsible For...' and to various Council-convened networks, internal, advisory and external committees, and external boards for the 2025/26 Mayoral year.

Council has since received a request to appoint Councillor Politis to the Older Persons Reference Group. This report therefore seeks to formally appoint Cr Politis to that role. There are no implications associated with this additional appointment, as the Terms of Reference place no limits on the number of Councillor representatives. As noted in December 2025, Council may amend these appointments at any time during the year.

Proposed amendment to the Instrument of Delegation Council to the Chief Executive Officer

Council is closely monitoring the current economic environment, which remains uncertain. Recent global events are contributing to volatility regarding the cost and supply of oil and gas. In the immediate term, we are seeing increases in the cost of petrol and diesel at the bowser, extending to higher fuel costs for anything requiring delivery. It is possible we may see increases in costs for most, if not all, goods, and services as well as shortages for products made from petroleum.

A delegation to the Chief Executive Officer is required to enable the subsequent sub-delegation of these delegated powers duties and functions to other Council staff. The current delegation allows the CEO to vary a contract, either in one instance or in aggregate, that was awarded:

1. Where the variation exceeds a total contract sum of 5% above \$800,000 (excluding GST) delegation limit; or
2. Where the value of the variation exceeds 5% of the total contract sum approved by Council.

In order to respond to any contract variations as a result of the uncertain times, it is recommended that the variation is increased from 5% to 15% for a six-month period. This allows officers to continue service delivery and the construction of our capital works projects in train without significant delays. At the conclusion of the six-month period, the variation threshold will revert to the standard delegation of 5%, with a report to be provided to the October 2026 Council meeting.

Community impact

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Strategic Risk Report identifies the impacts of climate change as a key strategic risk to Council, demonstrating recognition of the climate emergency and ensuring environmental sustainability considerations are embedded in strategic decision-making and risk management.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and this report does not contravene or limit any of the 20 fundamental human rights as set out in the Charter.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

Affected persons rights and interests

This report and its recommended decisions does not affect any person's rights.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in the matters listed.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7. Implementation

Governance activity, including reports of Committees to Council, Records of Meetings and Community Question Time items will continue to be reported to Council monthly.

Subject to Council's decision the next steps include:

- The Public Interest Disclosures Policy will be published on Council's website.
- The Terms of Reference for the Older Persons Reference Group will be updated to include Cr Politis (if appointed) and updated on Council's website.
- If approved, the Instrument of Delegation from Council to the Chief Executive Officer will be amended to vary the threshold from 5% to 15%; forwarded to the Mayor and Acting Chief Executive Officer for signing and made available on Council's website.
- A report to re-present the Instrument of Delegation from Council to the Chief Executive Officer will be scheduled for Council's October 2026 Council meeting.

Attachment/s

1 ↓	Reports from Advisory Committees to Council - April 2026	D26/141570
2 ↓	Records of Meetings - April 2026	D26/133788
3 ↓	Responses to questions taken On Notice - April	D26/136069
4 ↓	Summary of Minutes Audit and Risk Committee 3 March 2026	D26/130129
5 ↓	Public Interest Disclosure Policy	D26/138989
6 ↓	S5 Instrument of Delegation from Council to CEO - April 2026	D25/407269

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE - 24 FEBRUARY 2026**

A report of the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee meeting held on 24 February 2026 is provided for Council's information.

Councillors appointed to the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee: Cr Dr Jay Iwasaki.

Key items discussed

- Results of the fortnightly rubbish trial and upcoming community engagement on proposed municipal-wide fortnightly rubbish service. Learnings around choice of bin sizes and making concessions available. Council decision in June 2026.
- Merri-bek heat and flood vulnerability mapping.
- Climate Emergency Action Plan actions including support for renters, funding for climate resilience projects, and how community groups can support solar and energy programs.

Disclosures of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was disclosed at the meeting.

Committee recommendation

There were no recommendations from the committee to Council.

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 10 March 2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm to 6.50pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Jay Iwasaki, Deputy Mayor (Chair) Cr Katerine Theodosis Cr Liz Irvin
	Cr Helen Davidson Cr Ella Svensson
Apologies	Cr Chris Miles Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor
	Cr Oscar Yildiz JP Cr Sue Bolton
	Cr Helen Politis Cr Adam Pulford
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Council meeting agenda	Item 7.3 on agenda Cr Liz Irvin – material conflict – employer involved in the project	Yes
	Item 7.15 on agenda Cr Liz Irvin – material conflict – employer recommended as a panel supplier	Yes
	Item 12.2 on agenda – Directors and Acting Directors – confidential item (CEO Employment Matters)	Yes

Name and title of Council officer completing record:

Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting



Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 14 and 15 March 2026

Meeting time: 9:00am to 4:00pm; 9:00am to 12noon

This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

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The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Katerine Theodosis Cr Liz Irvin Cr Adam Pulford Cr Helen Davidson Cr Chris Miles Cr Ella Svensson Cr Sue Bolton
Apologies	Cr Helen Politis Cr Oscar Yildiz JP
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Jemma Wightman, Chief Financial Officer Riley Morton, Finance Accounting Coordinator Indivar Dhakal, Acting Manager City Design & Economy (Sat pm / Sun am)

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Budget Overview	Nil	
2 Financial Reserves	Nil	
3 Budget Planning – Prioritisation	Nil	
4 Matters Referred to 2026/27 Budget via Council Resolution	Nil	
5 Capital Works Program	Nil	

Name and title of Council officer completing record:

Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation

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Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 16 March 2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm to 8.10pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Katerine Theodosis Cr Liz Irvin Cr Adam Pulford Cr Helen Davidson Cr Chris Miles Cr Ella Svensson Cr Helen Politis
Apologies	Cr Sue Bolton Cr Oscar Yildiz JP
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Amy Carson, Unit Manager Children's Services Barry Hahn, Manager Early Years and Youth Jemma Wightman, Chief Financial Officer Mike Collins, Principal Advisor Social and Affordable Housing Alayna Chapman, Unit Manager Strategic Planning Amber Stuart, Unit Manager Arts and Culture Lisa Dempster, Manager Cultural Development Vaughn Allan, Unit Manager Transport Planning Telia Nevile, Diversity and Inclusion Officer Georgia Stringer, Acting Manager People and Safety

	Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1	Draft Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2030	-	
2	Draft financial hardship policy – key changes	-	
3	Merri-bek Affordable Housing Update	-	
4	Festivals Program	-	

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	Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
6	Merri-bek City Council Heritage Restoration Fund	-	
7	Shared e-bikes	-	
8	Gender Equality Action Plan Briefing	-	

Name and title of Council officer completing record:

Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Planning Briefing

Date: 23/03/2026

Meeting time: 6:00pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Sue Bolton Cr Liz Irvin Cr Helen Politis Cr Ella Svensson Cr Helen Davidson Cr Chris Miles Cr Adam Pulford Cr Katerine Theodosis
Apologies	Cr Oscar Yildiz JP
Council Staff (name and position)	Pene Winslade – Director Place and Environment Phil Priest – Group Manage City Development Mark Hughes – Unit Manager Urban Planning Ryan Hay – Planning Coordinator Esha Rahman – Planning Coordinator Aileen Chin – Planning Coordinator Alex Osborne – Principal Urban Planner
External participants	Nil.

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 City Development Activity Report (DEC QTR)	-	
2 Coburg Health Hub - MPS/2024/414 - 90 Bell Street, Coburg	1. Pene Winslade/ Mark Hughes 2. General 3. Nature of Conflict Involvement with advice on behalf of Council as land owner	Yes
3 MPS/2025/599 - 932 Sydney Road, Coburg North	-	

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Items discussed		Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
4	MPS/2025/369 - 278-282 Albert Street, Brunswick	1. Cr Liz Irvin 2. General 3. Nature of the conflict: Close family member owns an apartment in a neighbouring building	Yes
5	MPS/2025/528 - 74 Devon Road, Pascoe Vale	-	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Phil Priest, Group Manager City Development

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Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 30 March 2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm to 8.25pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

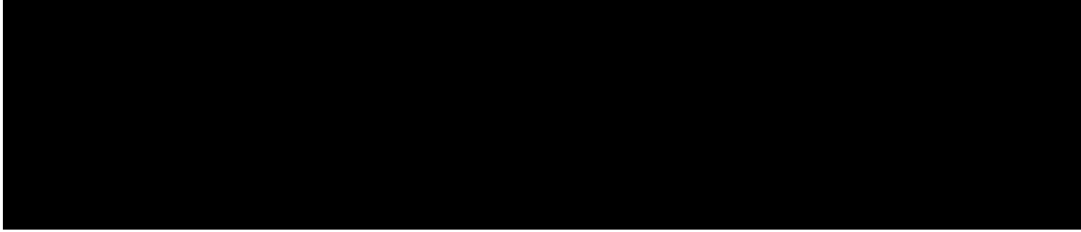
The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Chris Miles Cr Liz Irvin Cr Adam Pulford
	Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor Cr Sue Bolton Cr Helen Politis Cr Ella Svensson
Apologies	Cr Oscar Yildiz JP Cr Katerine Theodosis
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Jemma Wightman, Chief Financial Officer Yvonne Callanan, Manager Governance and Strategy Riley Morton, Management Accounting Coordinator Bec Fitzgerald, Coburg Revitalisation Lead Alex English, Principal Open Space Planner Bernadette Hetherington, Acting Manager Open Space and Environment Amber Stuart, Unit Manager Arts and Culture Lisa Dempster, Manager Cultural Development

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Budget briefing (inc including an update on the Year 2 Council Action Plan (2026/27))	Nil	
2 Central Coburg: update on work to refine framework plan	Nil	
3 Dog Walking in Merri-bek Project – Stage 1 trial completion	-	
4 Migrant history storytelling event	-	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Anita Curnow, Acting Director Business Transformation

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).



XRef: D25/611996
Doc. No. D26/143533
Enq: Vaughn Allan
Tel: 9240 1111

Romeo De Lorenzis



Dear Romeo

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM NOVEMBER 2025 COUNCIL MEETING

Thank you for your question submitted to the 12 November 2025 Council meeting. I am responding as the Director Place and Environment with oversight of Council's Transport Planning function.

A commitment was made to respond to the following question:

Why was O'heas street Bike line extension approved by council 12 June 2024 without properly informing all the affected local residents by mail with a copy of the final plans so that we the people could make an un-informed decision as to acceptance or refusal of the proposed road alteration?

Council officers sent a letter to all affected residents along the proposed extension and to residences and businesses within one block of the proposed extension. This letter included information about the intent of the project and that it extends the type of infrastructure that already exists on the eastern part of O'Hea Street. The letter also contained information on how people could view the proposed plans either online on Council's website or to access a physical copy.

Posters were also put up along O'Hea Street so that users of the street who may not have received a letter would also be made aware of the project and be provided with the opportunity to review the plans and provide feedback.

We received a total of 212 responses from affected community members in addition to three emails and three phone calls regarding the project.

Officers then presented the outcomes of this community engagement and recommended designs to Council at the June 2025 meeting, with Council endorsing the final designs.

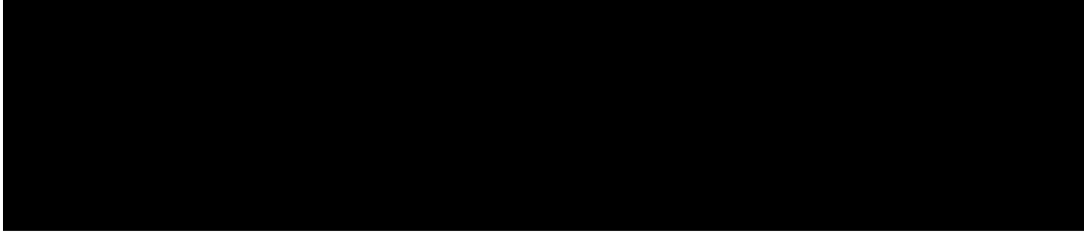
I trust this answers your question, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact Vaughn Allan, Unit Manager Transport Planning on [redacted] or 9240 1111.

Yours sincerely



Pene Winslade
DIRECTOR PLACE & ENVIRONMENT

30 / 03 / 2026



Doc. No. D25/670089
 Eng: D25/662651

Sophie Koutoulas

Dear Sophie

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM DECEMBER 2025 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your question submitted to the 12 December Council meeting, as follows:

What Council funding has been provided in the last 5 years to Merri-bek food relief charities in terms of monetary funding, housing, land or other, and to which charities has this been provided and why were they eligible?

For the purpose of this question, Council have kept the scope to food relief organisations as asked, and that is, organisations providing food free of charge to community members in need. This does not include broader food system initiatives or social enterprises such as Merri Food Hub or Coburg Commons (and its predecessor), nor does it include capital grants provided to Neighborhood Houses for infrastructure upgrades (for example, kitchen improvements), even where those facilities may have been used to support free meal programs.

The following are grant recipients

Organisation	Amount	Budget source / allocation process
Muslim Women's Council of Victoria	\$4053.00	Thrive grants (COVID) 2020/21 Culturally appropriate food relief
Our Daily Bread	\$23,878	2020/21 Capital Works Partnership Grant – Fridges, freezer, storage shed, shelving
Our Daily Bread	\$37,500	2023/24 Facility improvement grants Outdoor Facility Upgrade – install new outdoor seating and removable tables as well as create a garden setting with plants and a community herb garden.

Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre	\$3000	Community participation grant December 2024. Emergency response and recovery of the Welcome Centre and contribute to the vital funding of the food bank program.
Nourishing Neighbours Inc	\$30,000 (over three years 2024 - 2026)	2024/25 organisational establishment grant. A volunteer emergency food relief charity providing crisis relief to those most in need.
Open Table	\$7,000	2024/25 Community Strengthening grant Cook and Grow - social cooking group for play-group participants at the Glenroy Community Hub.

The following receive operational funding and support

Organisation	Amount	Budget source / allocation process
CIS Merri-bek	\$150,000 (\$50,000 per year over three years 2024 - 2026).	Funded through a 2023/24 budget submission Council resolved to fund CIS Merri-bek the amount of \$50,000 in each of the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years (\$150,000 in total over two and a half years). CIS Merri-bek takes a lead role in food and material relief sector to hold regular network meetings and support agency communication and collaboration. CIS Merri-bek is a local agency of the Statewide CIS branch representing service delivery of emergency relief, financial counselling, service referral

		for socially disadvantaged, marginalised population.
Wholefoods unwrapped collective	\$21,600 for the financial year 2024/25	Funded through a 2024/25 budget submission - Food Relief with Benefits program run alongside WUC's standard business operations. allocating funds reach more community members.
Nourishing Neighbours	Lease of James Martin Reserve Pigeon Club building via EOI	Formal Expression of Interest process applicant for Council facility for food relief operations (Commencing December 2025 – 2028 with optional extension).

Council in-kind support of food relief organisations

Organisation	Description	Background / reason for support
Muslim Women's Council of Victoria	Temporary access to Coburg Town Hall Kitchen and Coburg Bowls Club	Temporary access to the Coburg Town Hall kitchen (only permitted in 2020 under extraordinary circumstances during the Pandemic) Temporary access to the Coburg Bowls building to run food relief – short term arrangement 2021 – 2022 Needed to relocate after being supported by the Reynard St Neighbourhood House for a period.
Nourishing Neighbours and CIS Merri-bek	Food donations	Ad hoc arrangement with Merri-bek Meals production kitchen (RJ Hawk centre) who donated fresh and frozen meals surplus to requirements on an occasional basis in 2024/25
NorthPoint Centre Community Hub	Access to Newlands Senior Citizen Centre Carpark	Hire fee waived for food box distribution at Newlands Senior Citizen Centre carpark 2024/25.

Direct Service Delivery

Organisation	Background / reason for service
State Government (DFFH) and Council partnership	DFFH led partnership to provide food relief and other support for people in mandatory isolation due to COVID-19 (Ended June 2022)
OzHarvest	Due to increased demand for food relief services during the COVID-19 lockdowns, Council assisted with the coordination of supply and delivery of OzHarvest fresh food box distribution through local food relief services and neighbourhood houses. (2020)

I trust this answers your question/s, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me via [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Christina Grayland
ACTING MANAGER COMMUNITY WELLBEING

25/03/2026



Doc. No: D25/673739
XRef: D25/656570

Tony Rosios

Dear Tony,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM DECEMBER 2025 COUNCIL MEETING

Thank you for your questions submitted to the 10 December 2025 Council meeting and apologies for the delay in getting back to you. Answers to your questions are as follows:

- **What funding for the last three financial years has been given by the Council to religious faith groups?**

Over the past three financial years, Merri-bek City Council has supported many community organisations and community groups through Council's Community Grants Program, subsidised venue hire, and program partnerships.

This support is provided through a combination of financial funding and in-kind assistance, with the aim of increasing access and participation for community members across Merri-bek.

Further detail on organisations supported, funding allocations, and program outcomes is publicly available through Council's Annual Reports, Community Grants Program acquittal and recipient reports, and other published Council reporting.

All supported activities are open to the public and are required to deliver community-focused events or programs that align with Council objectives, strategies and policies. Funding is not allocated based on religious affiliation, but rather on demonstrated community benefit and alignment with eligibility criteria.

All funding and support are provided within Council's delegations and governance frameworks.

- **What religious / gender themes is the Council promoting over the next 12 months ensuring equality and diversity is maintained across all faith groups?**

The following religious and cultural dates of significance are marked, and a rigorous process is applied to ensure equity and representation of the community.

Significance
Midsumma Carnival
Day of Mourning/Survival Day
World Interfaith Harmony Week
Pride March
Anniversary of the Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples
Lunar New Year (Buddhism)
Ramadan (Islam) - dates TBC
International Mother Language Day
Holi (Hinduism)
International Women's Day
Cultural Diversity Week
Eid ul Fitr (Islam) - date TBC
Nawruz (Baha'i) - date TBC
Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees - date TBC

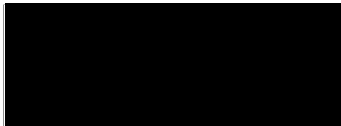
Holy Week (Orthodox)
Trans Day of Visibility
Pesach (Judaism) - dates TBC
Good/Holy Friday (Christianity)
Easter/Pascha (Christianity)
Good/Holy Friday (Orthodox)
Easter (Orthodox)
Vaisakhi (Sikhism)
Vesak/Buddha Day (Buddhism)
Neighbourhood House Week - dates TBC
IDAHOBIT
National Volunteers Week
Global Accessibility Awareness Day
National Sorry Day
Eid Al Adha (Islam) - dates TBC
National Reconciliation Week

Child Safety Week
Men's Health Week
Refugee Week (ends in World Refugee Day)
World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
Disability Pride Month
NAIDOC
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
Wear it Purple Day
RUOK Day
Rosh Hashanah (Judaism) - dates TBC
Dementia Action Week
Yom Kippur (Judaism) - date TBC
National Safety Month - Safety Week
Seniors Month
International Day of Older Persons
Wurundjeri Week - dates TBC
World Mental Health Day

National Carers Week
Dussehra/Dashain/Vijay Dashami (Hinduism)
Intersex awareness day
Diwali (Hinduism)
Trans Awareness Week/Trans Day of Remembrance
Guru Nanak Jayanti (Sikhism)
16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence
International Day of People with Disability
Human Rights Day
Christmas (Christianity)

Thanks again for your questions.

Yours sincerely



Christina Grayland
ACTING MANAGER COMMUNITY WELLBEING

25/3/2026



XRef: D26/107827
 Doc. No. D26/121321
 Enq: Vaughn Allan
 Tel: 9240 1111

Jen Hargrave
 [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Hargrave,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM MARCH 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

You recently lodged some questions to be asked Council in the chamber, which were not able to be addressed on the night. Thank you for your questions and your engagement with Council. I write to provide a written response to these questions submitted to the 11 March 2026 Council meeting.

Question 1: What is a quick, accessible way to report footpaths blocked dumped Lime bikes to council?

Merri-bek Council doesn't currently have an e-bike hire provider, so we shouldn't be seeing Lime bikes dumped on our footpaths. However, if you are finding Lime bikes dumped in Merri-bek, maybe they are being taken from another municipality. If that happens, there are a few ways community members can report it. You can let Council know, either by phone or via the 'report an issue' portal on Council's website. We will then contact Lime bikes to ask them to collect it. You may also report the issue directly with Lime via their website: <https://help.li.me/hc/en-gb/requests/new>.

Question 2: How would Council suggest people with mobility difficulties navigate the long stretch of bluestones on Nicholson St?

I'm pleased to let you know that Council has plans currently in train to rectify the long stretch of bluestone pavers on Nicholson Street, north of Glenlyon Road. This will replace the bluestone footpath with asphalt. The project is due for completion by end of June 2026. This work will make this section of Nicholson Street much more accessible for everyone.

Speak with us in your language		For more information visit merri-bek.vic.gov.au/your-language	
Per maggiori informazioni nella tua lingua, chiama il numero 9280 1911	اپنی زبان میں مزید جاننے کے لیے پر کال کریں۔ 9280 1917	如需了解更多您语言版本的信息, 请致电 9280 0750	अपनी भाषा में अधिक जानने के लिए 9280 1918 पर कॉल करें
Για να μάθετε περισσότερα στη γλώσσα σας, καλέστε το 9280 1912	तपाईंको भाषामा थप जान्नको लागि, 9280 1910 मा कल गर्नुहोस्	Para saber más en tu idioma llama al 9280 1916	To speak with us in a language not listed here, please call 9280 1919
لمعرفة المزيد بلغتك، اتصل بالرقم 9280 1913	Kendi dilinizde daha fazla bilgi edinmek için 9280 1914 'ü arayın	Để tìm hiểu thêm bằng ngôn ngữ của bạn, hãy gọi 9280 1915	

I trust this answers your questions however, if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Vaughn Allan on 9240 1111 or [REDACTED] Thank you again for engaging with Council and asking great public questions.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Pene Winslade
DIRECTOR PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

16 /March / 2026



XRef: D26/113306
 Doc. No. D26/143152
 Enq: Matthew Diemer
 Tel: 9240 1111

Maria Piccardini
 [REDACTED]

Dear Maria

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM MARCH 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your question submitted to the 11 March 2026 Council meeting, as follows:

Question 1:

Would like a bus stop (seat) in De Carle Street, Brunswick on both sides. Seat on Albion & De Carle Street in front of the dentist.

Thank you for your interest in improving amenity at bus stops within Merri-bek. The answer to your question is set out below.

Responsibility for the provision and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure, including seats and shelters, primarily sits with the Victorian Government through the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).

Notwithstanding this, Council advocates for improved bus stop amenity and has committed funding toward a program of installing seats at bus stops across the municipality, where feasible. Priority is given to locations based on factors such as passenger demand, proximity to key destinations (including medical services), equity considerations, and available space within the road reserve.

The locations you have identified at the intersection of Albion Street and De Carle Street will be added to Council's list of requested sites for assessment. As part of this process, Council officers will review each location to confirm feasibility, including footpath width, safety, and accessibility requirements.

Speak with us in your language		For more information visit merri-bek.vic.gov.au/your-language	
Per maggiori informazioni nella tua lingua, chiama il numero 9280 1911	اپنی زبان میں مزید جاننے کے لیے پر کال کریں۔ 9280 1917	如需了解更多您语言版本的信息, 请致电 9280 0750	अपनी भाषा में अधिक जानने के लिए 9280 1918 पर कॉल करें
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If deemed suitable, these sites will be considered for inclusion in future installation programs, subject to available funding and prioritisation against other locations across the municipality.

I trust this answers your question however, if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Matthew Diemer on 9240 1111 or

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Pene Winslade
DIRECTOR PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

30 / 03 / 2026



Committee:	Audit and Risk Committee (Established in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>)
Meeting Date:	Tuesday 3 March 2026
Representatives:	Councillor members - Cr Liz Irvin, Cr Helen Politis and Cr Katerine Theodosis (apology) Independent members - John Watson (Chair), Marilyn Kearney, Lisa Tripodi and Jeff Rigby
<p>The Audit and Risk Committee is chaired by Independent Chair, John Watson. The following business was conducted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No conflicts of interest were declared. 2. The Acting CEO advised the Committee that no issues relating to any impending legal action or known legislation breached or instances of fraud were noted. 3. The internal and external auditors reported that there had been no obstructions to the work of internal or external audit. 4. It was confirmed that the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 18 November 2025 had been circulated and confirmed out of session. <p>BUSINESS ACTIONS REPORT</p> <p>That the Audit and Risk Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NOTED the progress and status of Business Actions arising from previous committee meetings and the Internal Auditor's recent reports and publications report. <p>Finding:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management is progressing responses to Business Actions, noting there is a delay on one off track action. <p>ELEVATE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM REPORT</p> <p>That the Audit and Risk Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DISCUSSED and NOTED the status of the Elevate Transformation Program. <p>Finding:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Elevate Transformation Program is currently in the procurement and planning phase. <p>FINANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT</p> <p>That the Audit and Risk Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NOTED the progress against the 3-year Financial Management Improvement Plan. 2. NOTED the monitoring and update on Council's controls for unusual transactions above acceptable risk. 3. NOTED the management disclosures in financial reports of the effect of significant compliance issues. 4. NOTED Council's handling of accounting, internal accounting controls or auditing matters or other matters likely to affect the Council or its compliance with relevant legislation and regulations. 5. NOTED AND DISCUSSED the finance management report and mid-year financial review for the period ending 31 December 2025. 6. NOTED AND DISCUSSED the capital carry forwards. 	

Finding

1. Council is monitoring and managing its financial position and key controls.

CLIMATE RISK AND RESILIENCE REPORT

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **NOTED** ongoing policy changes and activities to manage and plan for climate change risks.

Findings

1. Recent changes to statutory planning policies in Victoria have implications to the management of climate risks in new developments in Merri-bek.
2. Climate change governance in Merri-bek is moving toward an integrated approach. A Climate Board will be established to oversee activities related to climate change mitigation and climate resilience. This will replace the Climate Resilience Integration Board and Zero Carbon Merri-bek Project Control Group.
3. Council is undertaking work to better understand climate and financial risk. This work directly supports the management of Council's strategic risk: The impacts of climate change, including physical and transition risks, are not appropriately planned for or responded to and Council's financial sustainability is not maintained.

AUDIT ACTIONS REPORT

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **DISCUSSED and NOTED** progress toward completion of outstanding audit action items.

Finding

1. Management continues to progress on the completion of actions arising from internal audits, noting there are delays on some audit actions.

COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT AND WORK PLAN REPORT

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **NOTED** the schedule to review the Community Directorate policies overdue for review.
2. **NOTED** the report on Councillor Expenses.
3. **NOTED** the report on Interstate and Overseas Travel.
4. **NOTED** the CEO credit card transaction.
5. **APPROVED** the bi-annual Audit and Risk report for CEO presentation to Council.

Findings

1. Management have a plan in place to review and update overdue policies in the Community Directorate .
2. Councillor expenses have been recorded in accordance with policy.
3. The Interstate and Overseas Travel register is current and contains a record of travel by Councillors and Officers.
4. The Chief Financial Officer has reviewed the credit card transaction for the CEO corporate credit card from 1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025.
5. The Audit and Risk Report bi-annual report is endorsed and recommended for reporting to Council.

MEMORANDUM OF AUDIT PLANNING AND AUDITS COMPLETED

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **DISCUSSED, ACCEPTED and ENDORSED** the findings, recommendations, and management comments for the following audits:
 - Customer Service and Complaints Handling
 - Strategic Planning Governance

2. **DISCUSSED, RECEIVED AND ENDORSED** the 2026/2027 Strategic Internal Audit Plan, noting that a total of six internal audits are planned for the period.
3. **NOTED** the progress made to date on the 2025-26 Strategic Internal Audit Plan.

Findings

1. The Customer Service and Complaints Handling audit identified findings and management comments have been provided against recommendations.
2. The Strategic Planning Governance audit identified findings and management comments have been provided against recommendations.
3. The Strategic Internal Audit Plan outlines the audits proposed to be completed in 2026/2027.
4. Sufficient progress has been made against the Internal Audit Plan.

EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **DISCUSSED RECEIVED and NOTED** the Audit Strategy Memorandum for the financial year ending 30 June 2026.
2. **NOTED** the January 2026 VAGO Status Report.
3. **DISCUSSED and ENDORSED** Council's response to the VAGO recommendations from the recent audit to assess the long-term financial sustainability of local government.

Findings

1. The Audit Strategy Memorandum for the financial year ending 30 June 2026 has been received.
2. Management has reviewed the January 2026 VAGO Status Report.
3. Approach to VAGO recommendations arising from the recent audit to assess the long-term financial sustainability of local government.

RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT

That the Audit and Risk Committee:

1. **NOTED** the recent activities detailed in the Information Technology update.
2. **NOTED** Council's management of complaints.
3. **NOTED** there have been no breakdowns in key controls.
4. **NOTED** the significant open Public Liability claims.
5. **APPROVED** the Strategic Risk Report for presentation to Council.
6. **NOTED** the recent activities of the CCTV Committee.

Findings

1. The Information Technology update outlines the results of the current Microsoft Secure Score, the results of a recent phishing simulation and the annual Disaster Recovery test.
2. Council continues to efficiently manage complaints.
3. There have been no breakdowns in key controls since the November committee meeting.
4. There are open public liability claims that may exceed Council's excess.
5. A Strategic Risk Report is recommended for reporting to Council.
6. A report from the CCTV Committee outlines requests, complaints and changes to the CCTV environment.

Forthcoming Meetings: 2/06/2026, 1/09/2026 and 24/11/2026

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower) Policy



Date Authorised by Council:	8 April 2026
Commencement Date:	8 April 2026
Review Date (4 years from authorised date):	April 2030
Responsible Department:	Governance and Strategy
Authorisation Reference:	D26/83607

1. Introduction

Council is committed to fostering an ethical, transparent culture. In pursuit of this, Council values the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing within the organisation so that it can be properly assessed and, if necessary, appropriately investigated.

Council will provide support to any employee, Councillor or other person who makes a disclosure about matters in public interest.

2. Context

This policy forms part of Council's Public Interest Disclosures framework and is an integral part of Council's procedures for the purposes of section 58 of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 (Vic) (PID Act).

This policy outlines Council expectations for the:

- a) facilitation of disclosures about the improper conduct of Councillors and Council officers under the PID Act
- b) handling of disclosures and the notification to, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), the Victorian Inspectorate, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, or other relevant integrity agencies.

It also sets out Council's commitment in supporting people from 'detrimental action' taken in reprisal for such disclosures.

2.1 Alignment

This Policy is aligned with and inform the application of Council's Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower) Procedure and Guidelines 1 - 4.

2.2 Organisational Context

- Local Government Act 1989
- Local Government Act 2020
- Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012
- Aged Care Act 2024
- Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011
- Public Administration Act 2004
- Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment (Public Interest Disclosures, Oversight and Independence) Act 2019

3. Objectives

The objective of this Policy is to outline Council's commitment to managing disclosures about serious wrongdoing at Council, relating to corrupt conduct or improper conduct, and to provide protections for people who make disclosures.

4. Policy details

This Policy, along with the associated Guidelines and Procedure as approved by the CEO, sets out how Council will meet its obligations under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012, and

Aged Care Act 2024 in responding to Public Interest Disclosures made about its elected representatives and employees. This policy, the Guidelines and Procedure underpin Council's commitment and ensure practical and effective guidance is available. This policy and Council's Public Interest Disclosure Guideline 1 – What is a Public Interest Disclosure and Guideline 2- How do I make a Public Interest Disclosure are available for public viewing at www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au.

4.1 Management of Conduct and Integrity

The operational measures in place to inform expectations of conduct at Council include, but are not limited to:

Codes of conduct (employee and Councillor); Council's Values;

- Position Descriptions;
- Enterprise Agreement;
- Employment contracts;
- Contracts;
- Internal CEO endorsed policies;
- Contract management framework;
- Guidelines and procedures;
- Performance and Development Reviews; and
- Learning and development program.

4.2 Wrongdoing

Serious wrongdoing includes corrupt conduct and improper conduct and should be reported immediately, following the guidance provided in the Guideline available on Council's website.

Corrupt conduct is the dishonest or partial exercise of official functions by a Public officer including:

- Conduct that adversely affects their or Council's honest performance of its functions
- Dishonest performance of public functions
- Intentional or reckless breach of public trust
- Misuse of information or material acquired in the course of public functions
- That results in a benefit to them directly or indirectly through a relative, an entity which they or a relative holds a financial interest or holds an agreement with.

Improper conduct includes any of the following:

- Corrupt conduct
- Criminal offence
- Serious professional misconduct
- Dishonest performance of public functions
- Intentional or reckless breach of public trust
- Intentional or reckless misuse of information
- Substantial mismanagement of public resources
- Substantial risk to health or safety of a person
- Substantial risk to the environment
- Conduct of any person that adversely affects the honest performance by a public officer of their functions
- Conduct of any person that is intended to adversely affect the effective performance by

a public officer of their functions for the benefit of the other person.

4.3 Other Wrongdoing

Council is committed to addressing any wrongdoing and this should always be reported in a timely manner so that it can be addressed.

Examples such as:

- Conflict of interest (that has not met the threshold to be corrupt or improper conduct)
- Harassment or unlawful discrimination
- Reprisal action against a person who has reported wrongdoing; or
- Practices that endanger the health or safety of staff or the public.

4.4 Management of Disclosures

4.4.1 Reporting a Public Interest Disclosure

Council expects that any instances of corrupt conduct, improper conduct or other wrongdoing will be reported without delay. To support the reporting of serious wrongdoing and protection for the individual reporting, Council encourages reporting such activity as a Public Interest Disclosure.

The Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines titled 'What is a Public Interest Disclosure' and 'How do I make a Public Interest Disclosure' are available on Council's website and provide guidance on the type of conduct that can be reported as a public interest disclosure, how to make a public interest disclosure and what happens after you have made a public interest disclosure.

Confidential guidance is available by contacting the Public Interest Disclosure Coordinator or a Public Interest Disclosure Officer.

Disclosures relating to Aged Care may also be made to:

- The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- The Department of Health, Disability & Ageing
- An independent aged care advocate
- A police officer

4.4.2 Handling of Public Interest Disclosures

Council expects that the disclosure of corrupt conduct or improper conduct will be handled respectfully, confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the PID Act, this Policy and the associated Guidelines and Procedure. The Procedure for the handling of Public Interest Disclosures sets out the expectations and key steps for the person who has received the disclosure and how the disclosure should be managed. The Guidelines, available on Council's website, provide guidance to a Discloser on what happens after a Public Interest Disclosure has been reported.

Information that is confidential relating to a Public Interest Disclosure includes:

- Information about the identity, occupation, residential or work address or whereabouts of a person who makes a public interest disclosure or against whom a disclosure has been made
- Information disclosed in a report of a public interest disclosure
- Information about an individual's personal affairs
- Information that, if disclosed, may cause detriment to a person.

4.4.3 Reporting to the wrong entity (Misdirected Report)

Should an attempt to report a Public Interest Disclosure be made to Council where Council is not the appropriate entity, the Discloser will be referred to the appropriate agency. Should Council receive a misdirected report - where Council is not the appropriate entity to receive the report - Council will refer the matter to the appropriate entity and inform the Discloser of the action taken.

4.4.4 Detrimental Action (Reprisals)

Council will not tolerate any reprisal action against public officers or members of the community who report wrongdoing. Council will act to protect Public Officers (Councillors, employees, contractors, volunteers, advisory committee members) who report wrongdoing from detrimental action. In practical terms, this means if the fact that a Public Officer has made a disclosure forms any part of the reason for which action is taken against them, it will constitute detrimental action and be reportable under the Public Interest Disclosure scheme as well as being a criminal offence. Detrimental action is also misconduct that justifies disciplinary action.

4.4.5 Mandatory Reporting

The CEO has a mandatory reporting obligation under the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2011 to notify IBAC of any matter they suspect on reasonable grounds to involve corrupt conduct occurring or having occurred.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Councillors	Councillors are responsible for ensuring good governance and ethical conduct of themselves and all Public Officers.	Ongoing

CEO	The CEO is responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring the Public Interest Disclosure Procedure and Guidelines that support this policy are approved. Mandatory reporting of corrupt conduct to IBAC (suspected or otherwise). Supporting a culture of disclosure and zero tolerance for corruption or improper conduct. 	Ongoing
Public Interest Discloser Coordinator (Manager Governance & Strategy)	Responsibilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal contact for Public Interest Disclosures within Council. document and manage the implementation of Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012. Review and update Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines and Procedure annually. Receive disclosures, including phone calls, emails and letters from staff or Councillors. Assess disclosures in accordance with the Act. Provide acknowledgment of receipt of Public Interest Disclosure to Discloser. Undertake risk assessments in consultation with Disclosers and other relevant officers. Liaise with other agencies about referral of Public Interest Disclosures. Allocate Investigator and Welfare Officer to each Public Interest Disclosure matter. Notify all assessable disclosures to IBAC within 28 days. Establish and manage a secure filing system and processes to ensure confidentiality. Manage the welfare of a Discloser and advise them of protections available under the Act. Track the actions taken in relation to disclosures. 	Ongoing
Public Interest Discloser Officers These are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unit Manager Governance and Risk Human Resources Business Partner 	Responsibilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact for Public Interest Disclosures within Council; Receive disclosures, including phone calls, emails and letters from staff or Councillors; Assess disclosures in accordance with the PID Act; Provide acknowledgment of receipt of Public Interest Disclosure to Discloser; Undertake risk assessments in consultation with Disclosers and other relevant officers; Liaise with Public Interest Disclosure Coordinator; Establish and manage a secure filing system and processes to ensure confidentiality; Manage the welfare of a Discloser and advising them of protections available under the PID Act. 	Ongoing

Public Interest Discloser Welfare Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice and information to Discloser on the Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines and Procedures. • Provide personal support and referral to other sources of advice or support as required. • Facilitate updates on progress of the investigation. • Proactively contact Discloser throughout the Public Interest Disclosure management process. • An appropriate officer will be assigned to support the Discloser of each Public Interest Disclosure. 	Duration of Public Interest Disclosure and beyond if required.
Investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct investigation of information in Public Interest Disclosure in accordance with terms of reference/delegation. • Prepare report for Public Interest Disclosure Coordinator. 	On engagement
Directors, Managers, Coordinators, Team Leaders, Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All leadership positions are responsible for ensuring good governance and ethical conduct of staff, contractors, volunteers or advisory committee members; • Leadership roles are 'Permitted Persons' within Council and able to receive a report of a Public Interest Disclosure from staff who report to them. 	Ongoing
Permitted person	<p>Council officers permitted to receive a Public Interest Disclosure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Interest Disclosures Coordinator • Public Interest Disclosures Officers • CEO • Directors, Managers, Coordinators, Team Leaders, Supervisors 	Ongoing
Aged and Community Support Staff	<p>Responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive aged care related disclosures including conversations, phone calls, emails and letters from staff or community members. • Escalate the disclosure to leader and Public Interest Disclosure Officers. 	Ongoing

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and review

This policy will be reviewed every four years or when any of the following occur:

- As required by legislation.
- The policy position is amended or replaced.
- Other circumstances as determined from time to time by a resolution of Council.

The guidelines and procedures within this policy will be monitored by the Manager Governance and Strategy (Public Interest Coordinator) on an ongoing basis and updated when any of the following occur:

- Opportunities to improve the guidance provided are identified.
- The related information is amended or replaced.

7. Definitions

Term	Definition
PID Act	The Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012
Conflict of interest	Conflicts can be actual, potential or perceived: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An actual conflict of interest occurs when a Public Officer's duties actually conflict with their private interests. • A potential conflict arises when a Public Officer's duties could conflict with their private interests. A Councillor or Council employee can anticipate potential conflicts by thinking about how their private interests and associations might influence their public duties. • Perceived conflicts stem from the reasonable view of the public or a third party that a Public Officer's private interests could improperly influence their decisions or actions, or the actions or decisions of their organisation.
Corrupt Conduct	Refer to section 4 of the Independent Broad-based Anti- Corruption Commission Act 2011 (IBAC Act).
Council	Merri-bek City Council
Discloser	Is a person who makes a Public Interest Disclosure in accordance with the Act.
Investigating Entity	Is an entity that can investigate a Public Interest Disclosure. These are the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) • Chief Commissioner of Police • Ombudsman • Victorian Inspectorate • Chief Municipal Inspector • Racing Integrity Commissioner • Information Commissioner. • Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

Public Interest Complaint	Means a public interest disclosure that has been determined by IBAC, the Victorian Inspectorate or the Integrity Oversight Committee to be a Public Interest Complaint (previously a protected disclosure complaint) in accordance with the Act.
Public Interest Disclosure	Disclosure by a natural person of information that shows/tends to show or information that the person reasonably believes shows / tends to show improper conduct or detrimental action (previously a protected disclosure).
Public Body	Council is a 'Public Body' as defined through the IBAC Act 2011.
Public Officer	Is defined by the IBAC Act 2011 and for Council means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Councillor within the meaning of section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1989 • a member of Council staff employed under the Local Government Act 1989 • a person that is performing a public function on behalf of a public officer or public body (Council), whether under contract or otherwise an employee of, or any person otherwise engaged by, or acting on behalf of, or acting as a deputy or delegate of, a public body (Council) or a public officer.
Serious Professional Misconduct	A serious failure to exhibit the skills and experience required to perform the functions of the office, as well as a serious breach of professional codes of conduct or the policies, procedures and laws that govern behaviour in the public sector and workplace.

8. Associated Documents

- Employee Code of Conduct
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy for Employees and Agents
- Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy for Councillors
- Procurement Policy 2025 -2029
- Fraud and Corruption Control Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Prevention Control Plan
- Information Privacy and Health Records Policy
- Complaint Handling Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy



S5 Instrument of Delegation to Chief Executive Officer

Merri-bek City Council

Instrument of Delegation

to

The Chief Executive Officer

S5 Instrument of Delegation to Chief Executive Officer

April 2026

Instrument of Delegation

In exercise of the power conferred by s 11(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 (**the Act**) and all other powers enabling it, the Merri-bek City Council (**Council**) delegates to the member of Council staff holding, acting in or performing the position of Chief Executive Officer, the powers, duties and functions set out in the Schedule to this Instrument of Delegation,

AND declares that

- 1. this Instrument of Delegation is authorised by a Resolution of Council passed on 8 April 2026;
- 2. the delegation
 - 2.1 comes into force immediately when signed by the Chief Executive Officer and Mayor;
 - 2.2 is subject to any conditions and limitations set out in the Schedule;
 - 2.3 must be exercised in accordance with any guidelines or policies which Council from time to time adopts; and
 - 2.4 remains in force until Council resolves to vary or revoke it.

Signed by Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Merri-bek City Council:)
)
)

In the presence of:

.....
Witness

Date:

Signed by Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor of Merri-bek City Council:)
)
)

In the presence of:

.....
Witness

Date:

SCHEDULE

The power to

1. determine any issue;
2. take any action; or
3. do any act or thing

arising out of or connected with any duty imposed, or function or power conferred on Council by or under any Act.

Conditions and Limitations

The delegate must not determine the issue, take the action or do the act or thing

1. if the issue, action, act or thing is an issue, action, act or thing which involves
 - 1.1 entering into a contract exceeding the value of \$800,000 (excluding GST) except if it is a contract for the supply of insurance;
 - 1.2 varying a contract, either in one instance or in aggregate, that was awarded:
 - a) where the variation exceeds a total contract sum of 15% above \$800,000 (excluding GST) delegation limit; or
 - b) where the value of the variation exceeds 15% of the total contract sum approved by Council;
 - 1.3 appointing an Acting Chief Executive Officer for a period exceeding 28 days;
 - 1.4 electing a Mayor or Deputy Mayor;
 - 1.5 granting a reasonable request for leave under s 35 of the Act;
 - 1.6 making any decision in relation to the employment, dismissal or removal of the Chief Executive Officer;
 - 1.7 approving or amending the Council Plan;
 - 1.8 adopting or amending any policy that Council is required to adopt under the Act;
 - 1.9 adopting or amending the Governance Rules;
 - 1.10 appointing the chair or the members to a delegated committee;
 - 1.11 appointing councillor or community delegates or representatives to external organisations;

- 1.12 making, amending or revoking a local law;
 - 1.13 approving the Budget or Revised Budget;
 - 1.14 the return of the general valuation and any supplementary valuations;
 - 1.15 approving the borrowing of money;
 - 1.16 adoption of the Auditor's report and Annual Financial Statements, Standard Statements and Performance Statement under Part 4 of the Act;
 - 1.17 subject to section 181H(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1989, declaring general rates, municipal charges, service rates and charges and specified rates and charges;
2. if the issue, action, act or thing is an issue, action, act or thing which is required by law to be done by Council resolution;
 3. if the issue, action, act or thing is an issue, action or thing which Council has previously designated as an issue, action, act or thing which must be the subject of a Resolution of Council;
 4. if the determining of the issue, taking of the action or doing of the act or thing would or would be likely to involve a decision which is inconsistent with a:
 - 4.1 policy; or
 - 4.2 strategyadopted by Council;
 5. if the determining of the issue, the taking of the action or the doing of the act or thing cannot be the subject of a lawful delegation, whether on account of s 11(2)(a)-(n) (inclusive) of the Act or otherwise; or
 6. the determining of the issue, the taking of the action or the doing of the act or thing is already the subject of an exclusive delegation to another member of Council staff.

7.10 CONTRACT AWARD: RFT 2026-4 - BRUNSWICK BATHS 50 METRE OUTDOOR POOL RETILE AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy

Community Wellbeing

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:
 - a) Make a formal offer to On Time Developments ACN 121 982 992 (Contractor) to award to the Contractor contract RFT-2026-4 for the Brunswick Baths 50 metre pool retile (Contract) on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:
 - i. for a maximum fixed lump sum of \$883,000 (excluding GST) plus provisional sum(s) of \$32,000 (excluding GST), totaling \$918,000 (excluding GST)
 - b) Negotiate and finalise the terms of the Contract between Council and the Contractor provided that:
 - i. the terms specified in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution shall not be altered without a further Resolution of Council; and
 - ii. other than terms referred to in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution, the terms of the Contract are acceptable to the Chief Executive Officer.
2. Conditional on acceptance of the Contract by the Contractor in accordance with the terms of this Resolution to do all things necessary to execute the Contract and any required documentation for the Contract; RFT-2026-4 for the Brunswick Baths 50 metre pool retile (Contract).

REPORT

Executive Summary

Brunswick Baths is one of six Council-owned Aquatic and Leisure facilities and has been a significant community asset since opening in 1914 as an outdoor pool. The facility has undergone several upgrades over time, including the addition of indoor aquatic and health and wellbeing spaces in 1929. In 2011, the site closed for a major redevelopment and reopened in 2014, delivering a modernized facility including a new 50 metre outdoor pool.

Instances of pool tiling adhesive failure has occurred across the aquatics industry. This has now occurred within the 50 metre outdoor pool at Brunswick Baths resulting in tiles debonding from the pool shell. This presents a risk to patron safety, compromises the integrity of the asset, and creates an unacceptable operational hazard. As a result, the pool will be temporarily closed to allow retiling works to be undertaken, ensuring safe and compliant operation.

The scope of works includes closure and isolation of the 50 metre outdoor pool, draining of the pool, removal and disposal of existing tiles and associated materials, preparation and inspection of the pool shell substrate, and the supply and installation of a compliant, fit-for-purpose tiling system.

The works were released to public tender on 19 February 2026, with submissions closing on 10 March 2026. One (1) conforming tender was received. Following a comprehensive evaluation process, including assessment of cost, capability, and risk, On Time Developments (OTD) has been identified as the preferred contractor.

The 50 metre pool is scheduled to be closed from 4 May 2026 to 30 September 2026 to facilitate the works. Council officers are working with YMCA and Belgravia Leisure to identify alternative service options for users during this period which will result in a variation to the Aquatics and Leisure Management Service Contract.

The tender complies with section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Previous Council Decisions

Not applicable.

1. Policy Context

This report is in keeping with Council's commitment to accountability and sound financial management. It also addresses the requirement under section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* which requires Council to adhere to its Procurement Policy when entering into contracts for the purchasing of goods or services, or the carrying out of works. Council adopted the Procurement Policy on 11 June 2025 which sets the threshold for conducting a public tender for goods, services and works where once-off or ongoing cumulative spend over the life of the contract is expected to exceed \$350,000 (incl GST).

2. Background

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to award a contract for the Brunswick Baths 50 metre Pool Retile Project for a five-month period commencing 1 May 2026.

Officers developed the project scope and technical specification, with input from aquatic industry specialists, to address Council's requirement to rectify the tile debonding issues within the 50 metre outdoor pool at Brunswick Baths. The specification has been designed to deliver a durable, compliant solution that ensures the long-term integrity and performance of the pool structure.

The scope of works includes the closure and isolation of the 50 metre outdoor pool, draining of the pool, removal and disposal of existing tiles and associated materials, and preparation of the pool shell substrate. This is followed by the supply and installation of a compliant, fit-for-purpose tiling system, including new tiles to the pool shell and associated areas. The works also include refilling, recommissioning, and provision of handover documentation.

The tender was released on 19 February 2026, with submissions closing on 10 March 2026. One (1) conforming tender was received. It was recognised that there is a limited number of contractors with the specialised capability required to deliver works of this nature.

Tenderers Name	ABN
On Time Developments Pty Ltd	86 481 291 023

Tender Evaluation

The conforming tender submissions were evaluated in accordance with Council's Procurement Policy, at the time of tendering and in accordance with the approved Procurement Evaluation and Probitry Plan for this project.

The following is a breakdown of the Evaluation Criteria applicable to this procurement project.

Criteria	Weighting
Cost	50%
Capability of the tenderer to provide the goods and/or services and/or works	10%
Capacity of the tenderer to provide the goods	10%

Criteria	Weighting
and/or services and/or works	
Methodology and task appreciation	10%
Tender Program/ Works Program	10%
Social Sustainability	2.5%
Economic Sustainability	2.5%
Environmental Sustainability	5%
Total	100%

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows.

Title and/or company	Project Mgr/ Generalist or Nominated Speciality	Full Voting / Advisory Member
Senior Projects Manager Aquatics	Project Mgr	Advisory
Unit Manager Aquatics and Leisure, Community Venues	Generalist (Chair)	Full
Acting Senior Project Manager Recreation	Generalist	Full
Senior Procurement Partner	Procurement	Advisory

Further details of tender evaluation are shown in the Tender Recommendation Report (**Confidential Attachment 1**).

3. Issues

Brunswick Baths records an average of 4,747 recreation swimmers per month over the winter period, highlighting its importance as a key aquatic facility within Merri-bek. Council is currently looking at options to service swimmers who would normally use the outdoor pool during this time, with a survey currently out to squad and aquatic members. Options include the extension of Oak Park Aquatic Centre throughout May on a trial basis, opening Coburg Leisure Centre earlier in the mornings and the use of Fawkner Leisure. It is also noted that alternative indoor aquatic facilities are available within a reasonable catchment, including those in neighbouring municipalities.

Site access is currently impacted by the redevelopment of the Bronson Centre taking place next door. Negotiations are in place with the developer on how project materials can be delivered and removed for the site.

Collaboration

Note that section 109(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that any report to the Council that recommends entering into a procurement agreement must include information in relation to any opportunities for collaboration with other councils or public bodies which may be available. Such information may include:

Under this contract there are no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils or public bodies because it is a local stand-alone construction project with specific timing requirements.

Interviews

No interviews were held.

Options

The preferred tenderer is On Time Developments Pty Ltd, with a lump sum contract value of \$883,000 (excluding GST) plus provisional sum(s) of \$32,000 (excluding GST), totalling \$918,000 (excluding GST). **Confidential Attachment 2** provides additional details on the value for money for this contract.

Social / Environmental / Local Implications

On Time Developments Pty Ltd has a social procurement policy under development and have noted that they will source as many local materials as possible

An Environmental Management Policy was provided in On Time Developments tender response. As part of their project methodology all waste from this project will be taken to a separation facility where waste will be sorted and recycled responsibly.

On Time Developments will base its operations out of Merri-bek whilst on site for the duration of the project purchasing from local businesses and using local suppliers whenever possible.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

4. Consultation / Recommendation from Management

The Aquatics and Leisure team, as the lead service unit for this tender process, consulted with YMCA and Belgravia Leisure to assess the operational impacts of the project. As the current facility operator, YMCA has undertaken member and user group communications, including surveys to inform stakeholders of the planned outdoor pool closure and to gather feedback on preferred alternative arrangements during the works period.

5. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council Officers, external consultants and all other parties involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter, other than a professional working relationship.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

A budget of \$1,000,000 has been allocated in the current budget and draft budget being developed. The 2026-2030 budget will be presented to Council on the 15 April special meeting for public exhibition and then adopted in its final form in late June.

The table below shows the breakdown of the budget for the entire works.

Item	Amount (excluding GST)
2025-26 budget (adopted budget)	\$300,000
2026-27 budget (draft – subject to Council endorsement)	\$700,000
Total Allocated Budget	\$1,000,000
Cost outside of contracted works	
Engineering, design works and quantity survey services	\$21,000
Total Available Budget	\$979,000
Less Retiling Works Costs	
<i>Recommended contract award: RFT-2026-4 RFT-2026-4 Brunswick Baths – 50m Pool Retile</i>	\$918,000
Provision for latent conditions or unforeseen costs	\$45,900
Total Project Cost	\$984,900
Potential project saving	\$15,100

In some cases, there will be contract variations required due to latent conditions outside of Council's and Contractor's control. In these instances, the delegated Council representative will have the authority to approve variations up to 5 per cent of the value of the contract as per the S5 Instrument of Delegation from Council to Chief Executive Officer.

7. Implementation and Timeline

It is proposed that the CEO be authorised to do all things necessary to execute the contract and any other required documentation.

The contract will commence as soon as possible following Council endorsement.

Site establishment and works to commence first week in May 2026

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|----------|---|------------|
| 1 | RFT-2026-4 - Tender Recommendation Report | D26/128275 |
| | <i>Pursuant to section 3(1)(g)(ii) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.</i> | |
| 2 | Brunswick Baths Pool Retiling - Quality Cost (QS) Plan | D26/141764 |
| | <i>Pursuant to section 3(1)(g)(i) and (g)(ii) of the Local Government Act 2020, this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets, and private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.</i> | |

7.11 CONTRACT AWARD: RFT-2026-1 - ROAD RECONSTRUCTION NORTH STREET, HADFIELD (SOUTH BOX COURT TO EAST STREET)

Acting Director City Infrastructure, Greg Rodwell

Capital Works Planning and Delivery

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:
 - a) Make a formal offer to **MJ Construction Group Pty Ltd ACN 092 432 730 (Contractor)** to award the Contractor contract **RFT-2026-1 for Road Reconstruction North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street) (Contract)** on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:
 - i. For total contract value of \$1,249,564.00 (excluding GST), with the fixed lump sum amount of \$959,648.00 (excluding GST) and provisional sum of \$178,480 (excluding GST) for Road Reconstruction between Richmond Street to South Box Court and additional provisional sum of \$111,436.00 (excluding GST) for Road Reconstruction between Richmond Street and East Street Roundabout.
 - b) Negotiate and finalise the terms of the Contract between Council and the Contractor provided that:
 - i. the terms specified in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution shall not be altered without a further Resolution of Council; and
 - ii. other than terms referred to in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution, the terms of the Contract are acceptable to the Chief Executive Officer;
2. Conditional on acceptance of the Contract by the Contractor in accordance with the terms of this Resolution:
 - a) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute the Contract and any required documentation for the Contract; and
 - b) Advises all tenderers of Council's decision in relation to the Contract.

REPORT

Executive Summary

The Road Reconstruction of North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street) has been included in the 2026–2027 Capital Works Program under the Roads and Carparks Program. The project forms part of Road 2 Recovery (R2R).

The scope of works includes the installation of major underground drainage pipes and associated pits, reconstruction of the road pavement, existing concrete kerb and channel, vehicle crossings, footpaths, and drainage upgrade. The work must be undertaken in coordination with Yarra Valley Water (YVW) as Council are doing drainage along YVW major water main.

Following the tender evaluation process, MJ Construction Group Pty Ltd has been identified as the preferred tenderer based on the strength of their submission. Subject to contract award, the contractor has confirmed readiness to commence offsite preparatory works from 7 May 2026.

MJ Construction Group has successfully delivered projects of similar scale and complexity for Merri-bek and other councils, with strong performance outcomes. Onsite construction is scheduled to begin in early May 2026 and is expected to be completed over a 19-week period by early-September 2026 (weather permitting). The works will be delivered in two to three distinct sections to minimise disruption to residents and local traffic.

The tender complies with section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Previous Council Decisions

There has been no prior Council decision in relation to this specific contract or project.

1. Policy Context

This report is in keeping with Council's commitment to accountability and sound financial management. It also addresses the requirement under section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* which requires Council to adhere to its Procurement Policy when entering into contracts for the purchasing of goods or services, or the carrying out of works. Council adopted the Procurement Policy on 11 June 2025 which sets the threshold for conducting a public tender for goods, services and works where once-off or ongoing cumulative spend over the life of the contract is expected to exceed \$350,000 (incl GST).

2. Background

The purpose of the report is to award a tender to a suitably qualified contractor to undertake Road Reconstruction North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street) as per the detailed drawings and specifications.

The tender was advertised via Council Procurement portal on 24 January 2026, inviting tenderers via the e-tender portal from suitably experienced contractors to undertake the works.

Tender was released on 24 January 2026 and closed at 3pm on 19 February 2026, with tenders received from following 7 contractors. Six tenderers were deemed conforming, and one tenderer was deemed non-compliant.

Tenderers Name	ABN
ADP Constructions Pty Ltd	46 118 588 097
AMH Civil Pty Ltd	25 626 019 734
CDN Constructors Pty Ltd	62 884 294 341
Civil Build Design (CBD) Consultants Pty Ltd	56 693 910 413
GP Bluestone Pty Ltd	64 604 987 519
MJ Construction Group Pty Ltd	56 092 432 730
Presta Construction Group Pty Ltd	73 675 131 870

Tender Evaluation

The conforming tender submissions were evaluated in accordance with Council's Procurement Policy, at the time of tendering, and in accordance with the approved Procurement Evaluation and Probity Plan for this project.

The following is a breakdown of the Evaluation Criteria applicable to this procurement project.

Criteria	Weighting
Cost	45%
Works Program & Methodology	7%
Capability	5%

Criteria	Weighting
Experience & Past Performance	4%
Capacity	4%
Complete Project Management Plan	10%
Customer Service	7%
Social Sustainability	5%
Economic Sustainability	4%
Environmental Sustainability	4%
Environmental Sustainability Construction Options	5%
Total	100%

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows.

Title and/or company	Project Manager/ Generalist or Nominated Speciality	Full Voting / Advisory Member
Team Leader Road Projects	Project Manager (Chair)	Full
Senior Construction Engineer	Generalist	Full
Principal Urban Planner	Generalist	Full
Procurement Partner	Procurement	Advisory
Senior Procurement Partner	Procurement	Advisory

Further details of tender evaluation are shown in the Tender Recommendation Report (**Confidential Attachment 1**).

3. Issues

Collaboration

Note that section 109(2) of the Local Government Act 2020 requires that any report to the Council that recommends entering into a procurement agreement must include information in relation to any opportunities for collaboration with other councils or public bodies which may be available.

Under this contract there are no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils or public bodies because it is a local stand-alone road re-construction and drainage project for which there is a healthy local market of contractors.

Interviews

The interview was held with the preferred contractor on 12 March 2026.

Social Implications

MJ Construction have implemented a Social Procurement Policy, along with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Modern Slavery Policies. These policies reflect the company's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce by employing individuals from varied social, political, and cultural backgrounds.

Environmental Implications

MJ Construction have established processes to recycle and reuse waste materials wherever possible and actively incorporates recycled products into their projects. For the North Street Road Reconstruction, the company will ensure that all excavated spoil, concrete, and asphalt are transported to appropriate recycling facilities. Additionally, they have mentioned that they will use tip truck to carry material both ways, making the process more efficient and reducing environmental impact.

Local Implications

MJ Construction is in Reservoir located within the Northern Councils Alliance (NCA) area. Demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting the local economy, MJ Construction regularly engages local suppliers in its operations and has identified three local businesses to be involved in the upcoming North Street Road Reconstruction project.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

4. Consultation

As part of the design phase, community consultation was carried out in March 2025 via a letter drop to property owners and residents, along North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street). Several residents expressed their support for the proposed works, and their feedback has been carefully considered in the final road design.

Prior to the commencement of construction, further notifications will be issued to the community through another letter drop by both the Contractor and Council to ensure clear communication and awareness.

5. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

One conflict of interest was declared by a voting member of the evaluation panel. This was assessed, in alignment with the Procurement Evaluation and Probity Plan and triaged accordingly.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

A budget of \$1,375,000.00 has been allocated in Council draft Capital Works Program for the financial year of 2026/27 for the Road Reconstruction Works of North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street). The budget is made up of both rates funding as well as roads to recovery grant funding. The 2026-2030 budget will be presented to Council on the 15 April special meeting for public exhibition and then adopted in its final form in late June.

However, the project will be brought forward to start construction in May 2026 to avoid the embargo period of Yarra Valley Water (i.e. from November to March).

In some cases, there may be contract variations required due to latent conditions outside of Council's and Contractor's control. In these instances, the delegated Council representative will have the authority to approve variations up to 5% of the value of the contract as per the S5 Instrument of Delegation from Council to Chief Executive Officer.

The table below shows the breakdown of the 2026/27 budget for the entire works.

Project Name	Allocated Budget (Excluding GST)
Road Reconstruction North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street)	\$1,312,042
Total Budget	\$1,312,042
Less	
Recommended contract award <i>RFT-2026-1 Road Reconstruction North Street, Hadfield (South Box Court to East Street)</i>	\$1,249,564
Provision for latent conditions or unforeseen costs	\$62,478

7. Implementation and Timeline

It is proposed that the Chief Executive Officer be authorised to do all things necessary to execute the contract/s and any other required documentation.

The contracts will commence as soon as possible following Council endorsement.

Construction works are planned to commence in early May 2026 and expected to complete in mid-September 2026.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1 | RFT-2026-1 - Tender Recommendation Report | D26/108497 |
|---|---|------------|

Pursuant to section 3(1)(g)(ii) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.

8. NOTICES OF MOTION

8.1 SUPPORTING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND STAFF

Cr Adam Pulford

Motion

That Council:

1. Acknowledges the huge contribution our local public schools, teachers, staff and school communities make to Merri-bek.
2. Notes reports that Victoria's public schools are the lowest funded in the country and that Victorian public teachers are the lowest paid in the country.
3. Writes to Victorian Minister for Education, the Honorable Ben Carroll to express Council's support for public school teachers, staff, parents and students who are calling on the Victorian Government to fully fund our public schools and provide fair pay and conditions to teachers and staff.

1. Background

Cr Pulford's background:

Successive Victorian Governments proudly declare Victoria 'the education state', yet our public schools are the lowest funded in Australia and public school staff are the lowest paid in the nation.

Staff are feeling underpaid and undervalued. The current pay and conditions for our public school teachers mean more people are leaving the profession. A recent survey by the Australian Education Union (AEU) showed that 30 per cent of early career teachers expect to leave the profession within ten years.

This risks worsening staff shortages, adding further pressure to remaining staff who are already over-extended and potentially increasing class sizes, reducing the quality of education for students.

For over seven months, the AEU and public school teachers and staff have been calling on the Victorian Government for a fair pay deal and to fully fund our public schools.

So far these calls have been ignored, so on Tuesday, 24 March, public school teachers and staff held their first stop work action in 13 years.

2. Policy Context

Officer's comments:

Merri-bek City Council's Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021–2025 provides a focus for lifelong learning and participation, improving health and wellbeing, and creating an inclusive city and community for children, young people and families.

To support participation and lifelong learning, key objectives include increasing participation in learning and education from birth to adulthood and collaborating with education providers to support quality settings.

3. Financial Implications

Officer's comments:

There are no financial implications arising from this resolution.

4. Resources Implications

Officer's comments:

The resolution can be actioned within existing resources.

8.2 **ADVOCATING TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT ON THE REMOVAL OF DEVON ROAD AND GAFFNEY STREET, PASCOE VALE RAILWAY CROSSINGS**

Cr Katerine Theodosis

Motion

That Council:

1. Writes to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public, and Active Transport in Victoria, the Honorable Ben Carroll, advocating for:
 - a) Removal of the Devon Road and Gaffney Street level crossings.
 - b) Rebuilding Pascoe Vale railway station.
 - c) Extension of Craigieburn shared path from Devon Road south to Gaffney Street.
2. Adds the removal of the Devon Road and Gaffney Street Level crossings to its existing state advocacy priorities.

1. Background

Cr Theodosis's background:

The Devon Road and Gaffney Street level crossings in Pascoe Vale are unsafe and lead to significant congestion for our local community. Boom gate closures frequently exceed 10-15 minutes, contributing to traffic delays and rat-running behaviour through our local streets.

Gaffney Street is a key access area for Pascoe Vale Primary School, which increases the risk for families and children during peak periods. The proposed childcare centre on Devon Road will offer similar risks.

There has been substantial investment through the Level Crossing Removal Project in Merri-bek including Glenroy, Coburg and Moreland Station. It is crucial that Devon Road and Gaffney Street must be considered for removal by the State Government.

2. Policy Context

Officer's comments:

Moving Around Merri-bek – Transport Strategy 2024

Whilst Devon Road and Gaffney Street are not particularly named in Council's Moving Around Merri-bek – Transport Strategy 2024 and the subsequent Action Plan, the strategy refers to advocating for better public transport and accessibility through the advocacy on level crossing removal projects. The extension of shared path aligns with Council's strategy and in Council's action plan.

Council Plan 2025-2029

Removal of level crossing at busy arterial and local road and extension of shared path along railway corridor supports Council's Beautiful and Liveable City objectives for accessible, healthy, and liveable communities by improving road safety, supporting active travel, and reducing travel times.

3. Financial Implications

Officer's comments:

The proposed Notice of Motion has no significant financial implications and drafting of the letter to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Public, and Active Transport and adding the removal of Devon Road and Gaffney Street Level crossings and extension of Craigieburn shared path to the existing state advocacy priorities can be done by utilising existing staff time.

4. Resources Implications

Officer's comments:

There are no resource implications for the proposed Notice of Motion and can be delivered within existing resources.

8.3 ENFORCEMENT OF CONTAMINATION AT DEMOLITION SITES IN MERRI-BEK

Cr Nat Abboud

Motion

That Council writes to the Hon. Ben Carroll, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, requesting measures to improve on-site transparency for the community and provide assurance that asbestos has been safely removed before demolition works begin.

1. Background

Cr Abboud's background:

Council receives many complaints each year from community members about demolition practices in Merri-bek. While most property owners and demolition companies obtain the required permits, follow WorkSafe requirements, and safely manage asbestos, this does not always occur. In a privatised building industry with multiple regulators, it can be difficult for residents to confirm that proper approvals and safety measures are in place during nearby demolitions. Community members also report difficulty obtaining reassurance from WorkSafe that their health is not at risk.

2. Policy context

Officer's comments:

Demolition works in Victoria require a building permit, which is usually issued by a private building surveyor registered with the Victorian Building and Plumbing Commission. As a result of the privatised building system, councils have limited involvement in approving or overseeing demolition works in Merri-bek.

When issuing a demolition permit, a private building surveyor is not required to confirm that asbestos will be safely removed. This responsibility sits with the appointed builder or demolisher, who must also be registered. Legislation requires builder details to be displayed on site, and the private building surveyor is responsible for ensuring this occurs. This allows residents to contact the builder to seek assurance about asbestos removal, although this does not always result in satisfactory responses.

The safe handling and disposal of asbestos is a serious health and safety issue regulated by WorkSafe. Incidents involving illegal demolition or inadequate asbestos controls are treated seriously by WorkSafe.

3. Financial implications

Officer's comments:

There are no financial implications arising from this resolution.

4. Resources implications

Officer's comments:

The resolution can be actioned within existing resources.