

Best value

At least once every year a council must report to its community on what it has done to ensure it has given effect to the best value principles. This is a requirement under section 208G of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

The best value principles require council services to:

- a. meet high quality and cost standards
- b. be responsive to community needs
- c. ensure high levels of accessibility
- d. achieve continuous improvement in its operation
- e. consult with the community on service levels.

The new *Local Government Act 2020* (the 'Act') received Royal Assent on 24 March 2020. The first phase of its reforms was proclaimed on 6 April 2020. The new Act reforms the local government sector. It aims to improve democracy, accountability and service delivery.

The new Act is based on 5 principles that support us to drive ongoing improvement. These are:

1. **Community engagement.** This principle aims to ensure all Victorians have the opportunity to engage with their council on the future of their community.
2. **Strategic planning.** This requires councils to develop an integrated, longer-term and transparent approach to planning that supports councillors in leading strategically, rather than focusing on operational issues.
3. **Financial management.** This principle aims to ensure rates will be used to deliver a range of services and infrastructure.
4. **Public transparency.** This principle supports openness, accountability and honesty to build high levels of accountability and trust among citizens and enable fully informed engagement in the democratic process.
5. **Service performance.** This principle ensures councils deliver services to the community that are equitable, accessible, good value and meet the needs of their diverse communities.

We continued to drive performance improvement and ensure service delivery aligned to the best value principles and the *Local Government Act* principles.

This included:

- continued work to improve our planning and budgeting approach
- a series of service reviews
- an ongoing continuous improvement program (outlined below).

1. Annual service planning and budgeting

The annual planning and budgeting working group continued to support the implementation of the council plan and service delivery initiatives.

We used the online budget simulator to engage with the community and ensure the budget would meet community expectations. This work took place in November and December 2019.

We held 3 pop up engagement sessions at:

- Brunswick Library
- Glenroy Library
- Coburg Night Market.

During the budget consultation we held 2 phone-in sessions for the community to provide feedback.

We held engagement sessions across the business for the annual planning of the council action plan, service unit plan and budget. This was led by a cross-organisational team.

We performed quarterly reviews of the budget aligned to the council action plan and integrated reporting to Council.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on service delivery and results was seen in the third quarter and end of year reporting. COVID-19 has had an impact on operations and direction across the organisation. Actions to respond to the pandemic replaced expected actions in service unit plans for many teams.

Our performance for the 2019-20 financial year was 80% completion of service plan actions. This was down from 95% for the 2018-19 financial year.

2. Service reviews

During the year we reviewed several of our services. We did this to ensure their way of working provides best value in the performance of their operations.

Risk, Insurance and Audit Review

In mid-2019 we undertook a review of the risk, insurance and audit functions within Corporate Governance. The audit function provides leadership and coordination of the internal audit program and management of the Audit and Risk Committee to drive continuous improvement, performance and risk management across our operations.

The risk function provides leadership in managing Moreland Council's:

- risk profile
- business continuity efforts
- insurance program.

We reviewed the processes and structure of these functions to determine how best to strengthen our approach to risk management.

As a result, we combined the audit, risk and insurance functions and formed the Integrity, Risk and Resilience Unit. This has increased capacity to provide strategic risk advice. We incorporated responsibility for fraud prevention and control into the Unit. This was along with responsibility to lead establishment of an Environmental Management System (EMS).

The revised structure will improve organisational performance in risk management, audit, fraud prevention and control, and the EMS. It will also build organisational capability through pro-active communication, development and training opportunities.

City Strategy and Design

We completed a restructure of the City Strategy and Design Branch in 2019-20. This followed an organisation-wide restructure in 2018.

The Amendments Unit became a Strategic Planning Unit. It now has responsibility for both land use strategy and planning scheme amendments. This ensures greater alignment between the 2 outputs and improved planning scheme outcomes.

These changes enabled the creation of a new Strategy and Research Unit. This ensures we can better plan for Moreland's growing population, informed by evidence and research. It also establishes a central point in the organisation to steward strategies that drive business and investment prioritisation. This unit leads community infrastructure planning.

It also established an Affordable Housing Lead to maximise outcomes for affordable housing that can be leveraged from:

- private development
- the Moreland Affordable Housing Ltd
- advocacy.

Information Technology

In mid-2019 we reviewed our Information Technology and Records Management Branch. The review involved a maturity assessment of ICT functions, processes and capabilities. We also conducted high-level benchmarking of ICT services with neighbouring councils. The review resulted in a reallocation of resources from existing teams and the creation of new services.

We created dedicated reporting and analytics roles to centralise and standardise our approach to reporting on key metrics and improve decision making through better business intelligence.

A centralised IT project services team was also created to standardise and improve our IT project management services.

Environmental health

Following the digitisation of environmental health in the previous year, we took more opportunities to leverage these benefits and improve communications with our customers.

We sent a survey and series of digital communications to all our food premises and other customers. These sought to:

- inform customers of any changes in the service
- give news updates
- provide general environmental health advice to assist customers with their businesses.

This communication method was particularly useful for communication about changes due to COVID-19.

We also sent all health registration renewals electronically for the first time. This allowed customers to apply and pay online with ease. This saved time and money associated with mailing renewals and registration stickers. It was also more environmentally friendly and a much better experience for our customers. This has resulted in greater take up of registration and reduced follow up for our staff.

Building Services Unit

The Building Services Unit reviewed its report and consent procedures during the year. We identified opportunities to make improvements to systems and processes. We made improvements to streamline workflows and digitise the service.

This work was accelerated just before COVID-19. This meant that at the start of the pandemic the service was able to operate remotely. The implementation of online lodgement and elimination of paper files proved essential for our customers unable to access our front counters. This allowed us to maintain our service throughout the pandemic.

Planning Enforcement Unit

We identified opportunities to make improvements to systems and processes in our Planning Enforcement Unit. We did this through an internal audit.

The enhanced, proactive planning enforcement approach is now well established. This includes 2 extra staff members. The service is meeting all targets associated with monitoring developments to ensure they follow planning approvals.

The program has found common areas of non-compliance. These relate to landscaping completion or commitments to environmental features, such as water tanks or solar panels, that were not being met. These are now being strictly enforced.

The Urban Planning Unit has trialled our Design Excellence Scorecard. This sets an aspirational benchmark for design excellence. It incentivises new development in Moreland to strive for better than the 'acceptable' design outcomes required through the Victorian planning system or achievable through VCAT appeals.

We have seen a small handful of projects meet the scorecard. Many more have been enhanced through efforts to deliver:

- improved Environmentally Sustainable Development
- disability access
- quality architecture
- affordable housing
- other community benefits.

3. Continuous improvement program

We continued to streamline and improve processes over the past year. We also worked to build our continuous improvement capability in line with the *Local Government Act 2020*. This has led to better outcomes for the community and more efficient ways of working internally.

A large focus was enabling Moreland employees to take part in continuous improvement via a structured program of work. This delivered key improvements in our customer service approach including:

- keeping our Customer Service team informed of breaking news
- an improved approach to how we handle phone messages from the community
- ensuring managers are kept informed on the customer service performance of their team.

The program has also improved how we engage with our external legal advisors.

The introduction of continuous improvement capability building has helped to nurture ideas for service unit improvements. This has resulted in a reduction in time spent on non-value-added activities. We have more time to focus on servicing the community.

We have automated many manual processes, including:

- Open Spaces implemented ground inspection software. This enables real-time mobile reporting, including photos, of any issues in our sports fields. This software also escalates occupational health and safety concerns directly to team supervisors.
- Youth Services integrated the system for booking meeting rooms and their bus into our customer request system.

We have streamlined processes to reduce cycle time or costs, including:

- Human Resources introduced online police checks. This reduces the time it takes to process new candidates, while improving the experience for applicants.
- Human Resources reviewed employee training and introduced better quality courses at a reduced price.
- Human Resources reviewed and streamlined our process for advertising vacant positions. This provides additional advertising for a reduced price.

We have laid a solid foundation in our continuous improvement work. This has been practiced and tested during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge showed our values-based approach to working together to deliver improvements to the way we work now and into the future.