

MINUTES



Mid-Month Meeting of Council



Held at the
Civic Centre
511 Burwood Highway
Wantirna South
On
Monday 10 November 2025

The Agenda for the Mid Month Meeting of Council, Monday 10 November 2025, forms part of these Minutes and is attached in full at the end of the Minutes.

These Minutes are considered draft until adopted and confirmed at the next Mid Month Meeting of Council.

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm.

PRESENT:

Cr Lisa Cooper (Chairperson)
Cr Glen Atwell (Deputy Mayor)
Cr Chris Duncan
Cr Robert Williams
Cr Meagan Baker
Cr Parisa Considine
Cr Peter Lockwood
Cr Susan Pearce
Cr Paige Kennett

Scott Ward
Tirhatuan Ward
Collier Ward
Dinsdale Ward
Dobson Ward
Friberg Ward
Baird Ward
Taylor Ward
Chandler Ward

Bruce Dobson
Grant Thorne
Jonathan McNally
Judy Chalkley
Matt Kelleher
Navec Lorkin
Andrew Dowling
Saskia Weerheim

Chief Executive Officer
Director - Infrastructure
Acting Director - City Liveability
Director - Connected Communities
Interim Director - Customer & Performance
Chief Financial Officer
Manager - Governance & Risk
Head of Governance

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1 Apologies And Requests For Leaves Of Absence

Nil.

2 Declarations Of Conflict Of Interest

Councillor Baker foreshadowed:

- Declaring a general conflict of interest in Item 4.1, Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund 2025-26 Monthly Report;
- Making a statement of transparency for Item 6.1, Lease Agreement between Knox City Council and Scouts Victoria.

Councillor Duncan foreshadowed declaring a general conflict of interest in Item 4.1, Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund 2025-26 Monthly Report.

3 Confirmation Of Minutes

The Chairperson, Councillor Lisa Cooper invited Councillors to raise any opposition to the Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on Monday 13 October 2025. There being none, the Chairperson declared the Minutes be confirmed.

The Chairperson, Councillor Lisa Cooper, varied the Order of Business with leave of Council, to enable consideration of a Memorial prior to Item 4 Officer Reports.

Memorial – Ben Austin

Councillor Baker acknowledged the passing of 17 year old Ben Austin on 30th October from a tragic accident whilst training in the practice nets at Wally Tew Reserve, Ferntree Gully.

Councillor Baker noted that with cricket being described as one of the joys of his life, Ben was actively involved in the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club, Mulgrave Cricket Club and Eildon Park Cricket Club. Being a dedicated sportsman, Ben also played more than 100 games for the Waverley Park Hawks Junior Football Club and was the runner up in this season's club best and fairest.

Councillor Baker noted that Ben will be remembered as a loving, respectful and beautiful boy, a talented cricketer on the rise. One of his coaches described him as an enthusiastic, very fit young man who showed outstanding leadership qualities. Ben's teammates will miss his catch cry "here we go, lads" prior to a game.

Councillor Baker passed on Council's sincerest condolences to Ben's mother, Tracey, father Jace, brothers Cooper and Zack, family, friends and the cricket community.

4 Officer Reports

4.1 Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund 2025-26 Monthly Report

SUMMARY

This report summarises the grant applications recommended for approval in November 2025 for the 2025-26 Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund. All applications have been assessed against the criteria set out in the Knox City Council Community Grants Guidelines 2025-2026 (Guidelines).

Applications under the Minor Grants Program are limited to a maximum of \$2,500.00 within the current financial year.

Applications under the Emergency Relief Fund are limited to \$20,000.00 within the current financial year.

This report also includes more information on Community Development Fund Application “2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club”. This application was discussed at the 27 October 2025 Meeting of Council and further information was requested to understand why the application was unsuccessful.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Approve two applications under the Minor Grants Program for a total of 2,203.23 (excluding GST) as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program				
Applicant Name	Project Title	10% Contribution for Equipment	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
2 nd /3 rd Bayswater Scout Group	From Plates to People: Strengthening Community Through Shared Meals Funding is being sought to upgrade kitchen items that will boost hall hire, attract community events, and support affordable, accessible Scouting for local families.	\$182.95	\$1,829.55	\$1,663.23 (lesser amount due to GST)
Knox Obedience Dog Club Inc.	Connecting Knox Through Responsible Dog Ownership Funding is being sought for a one-off community engagement and education campaign that promotes wellbeing, safety and inclusion through dog training.	N/A	\$540.00	\$540.00
Total			\$2,369.55	\$2,203.23

2. Defer one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program			
Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Deferral	Amount Requested
One Hope Community Church	Outdoor Blinds for Community@Cavell	Waiting for additional information	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

3. Refuse one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program			
Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Ineligibility	Amount Requested
Restore Community Care	Restoring Broken Lives	Duplicate application – the same project has been applied for under the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) this month. The project has been recommended for funding under ERF.	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

4. Note that should the recommended Minor Grants be approved by Council, the remaining budget for 2025-26 will be \$99,842.38 after GST adjustments.
5. Approve one application under the Emergency Relief Fund for a total of \$11,531.81 (excluding GST) as detailed below:

Emergency Relief Fund				
Applicant Name	Project Title	Co-contribution from the Organisation	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
Restore Community Care	Filling Plates, Filling Hearts Funding is being sought to provide short-term emergency relief to the community who are in urgent need of assistance.	Total project cost \$20,000.00, including \$7,000.00 contribution from organisation	\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81 (lesser amount due to budget being exhausted)
Total			\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81

6. Note that should the recommended grant be approved by Council, the Emergency Relief Fund budget for 2025-26 will be exhausted with no budget remaining.
7. Note the information provided in relation to the Community Development Fund Application 2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club and uphold the Community Development Fund Assessment Panel's decision to decline this application.

Pursuant to Section 130 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) and Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council, Councillor Baker declared a general conflict of interest in this item on the grounds that she has a family member on the Committee of the Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club who are an applicant within this item.

Pursuant to Section 130 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) and Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council, Councillor Duncan declared a material conflict of interest in this item on the grounds that he is on the Executive Committee of the Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club who are an applicant within this item.

Councillor Baker left the meeting at 7:13 pm before the discussion and vote on item 4.1

Councillor Duncan left the meeting at 7:13 pm before the discussion and vote on item 4.1

The Chairperson, Councillor Lisa Cooper, proposed under Governance Rule 35, that Council separately consider the Community Development Fund Application for Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club –enabling Councillor Baker and Councillor Duncan to return to the Meeting to consider the balance of this item which relates to Minor Grants and the Emergency Relief Fund.

RESOLUTION – PART 1

MOVED: Councillor Cooper

SECONDED: Councillor Lockwood

That Council resolve to note the information provided in relation to the Community Development Fund Application 2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club and uphold the Community Development Fund Assessment Panel’s decision to decline this application.

CARRIED

Councillor Baker returned to the meeting at 7:18pm following the vote on Part 1 of Item 4.1 - Community Development Fund Application for Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club

Councillor Duncan returned to the meeting at 7:18pm following the vote on Part 1 of Item 4.1 - Community Development Fund Application for Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club

RESOLUTION – PART 2

MOVED: Councillor Williams

SECONDED: Councillor Pearce

That Council resolve to:

- 1. Approve two applications under the Minor Grants Program for a total of 2,203.23 (excluding GST) as detailed below:**

Minor Grants Program				
Applicant Name	Project Title	10% Contribution for Equipment	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
2nd/3rd Bayswater Scout Group	From Plates to People: Strengthening Community Through Shared Meals Funding is being sought to upgrade kitchen items that will boost hall hire, attract community events, and support affordable, accessible Scouting for local families.	\$182.95	\$1,829.55	\$1,663.23 (lesser amount due to GST)
Knox Obedience Dog Club Inc.	Connecting Knox Through Responsible Dog Ownership Funding is being sought for a one-off community engagement and education campaign that promotes wellbeing, safety and inclusion through dog training.	N/A	\$540.00	\$540.00
Total			\$2,369.55	\$2,203.23

2. Defer one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program			
Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Deferral	Amount Requested
One Hope Community Church	Outdoor Blinds for Community@Cavell	Waiting for additional information	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

3. Refuse one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

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Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Ineligibility	Amount Requested
Restore Community Care	Restoring Broken Lives	Duplicate application – the same project has been applied for under the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) this month. The project has been recommended for funding under ERF.	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

4. Note that should the recommended Minor Grants be approved by Council, the remaining budget for 2025-26 will be \$99,842.38 after GST adjustments.
5. Approve one application under the Emergency Relief Fund for a total of \$11,531.81 (excluding GST) as detailed below:

Emergency Relief Fund				
Applicant Name	Project Title	Co-contribution from the Organisation	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
Restore Community Care	Filling Plates, Filling Hearts Funding is being sought to provide short-term emergency relief to the community who are in urgent need of assistance.	Total project cost \$20,000.00, including \$7,000.00 contribution from organisation	\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81 (lesser amount due to budget being exhausted)
Total			\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81

6. Note that should the recommended grant be approved by Council, the Emergency Relief Fund budget for 2025-26 will be exhausted with no budget remaining.

CARRIED

4.2 Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 - Mid-Term Review

SUMMARY

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027 (the Strategy) was approved by Council in April 2023. The Strategy outlines Council's role in, and commitment to, supporting our community in accessing safe and secure housing. Council's approach recognises the importance of partnering with other tiers of government to support residents. The Strategy acknowledges that whilst local government can facilitate elements of increasing social and affordable housing, funding and management essentially rests with the State Government and the community housing sector.

This report provides a mid-way review of key achievements, case studies, progress against each of the actions, and opportunities for the remainder of the implementation period.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to receive and note this mid-term review of the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Lockwood

SECONDED: Councillor Atwell

That Council resolve to receive and note this mid-term review of the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027.

CARRIED

4.3 Event Option for Australia Day 2026

SUMMARY

This report responds to Councillors' request to develop a proposal for an event to acknowledge and celebrate Australia Day in 2026.

The report outlines a small-scale event for Tim Neville Arboretum and is now presented to Council for a decision on whether to proceed with an event, and to allocate a budget for delivery of the event.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to:

1. Support a small-scale event "Knox Picnic in the Park" at Tim Neville Arboretum on Monday 26 January 2026 for the purpose of celebrating Australia Day.
2. Note the successful application made to the National Australia Day Council for \$10,000 to support this event.
3. Allocate \$30,000 (ex GST) of additional funding for this event to be delivered.

MOTION

MOVED: Councillor Duncan

SECONDED: Councillor Pearce

That Council resolves to:

1. Support a small-scale event "Knox Picnic in the Park" at Tim Neville Arboretum on Monday 26 January 2026 for the purpose of celebrating Australia Day.
2. Note the successful application made to the National Australia Day Council for \$10,000 to support this event.
3. Allocate \$30,000 (ex GST) of additional funding for this event to be delivered.

LOST

PROCEDURAL MOTION

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Cooper

SECONDED: Councillor Baker

That Council adjourn the Meeting for 10 minutes.

CARRIED

The Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm and resumed at 8:19 pm with all Councillors present except for Councillor Baker who retired from the Meeting.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Duncan

SECONDED: Councillor Williams

That Council resolve:

1. To authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates) to liaise with the National Australia Day Council to determine opportunities to amend Council's grant proposal;
2. To request officers, subject to the feedback received from the National Australia Day Council, to develop a proposal for an alternative Australia Day event limited to the value of grant funding plus a Council contribution of \$10,000; and subject to such other conditions as may be imposed by the National Australia Day Council; and
3. In the absence of a feasible proposal, to authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates) in consultation with the Mayor, to withdraw its grant application and not proceed with an event for Australia Day 2026.

CARRIED

4.4 Councillor Appointments to the Knox Local Safety Committee

SUMMARY

At its meeting on 25 August 2025, Council unanimously agreed that the creation of a Local Safety Committee (LSC), in partnership with Victoria Police, represents a positive, collaborative, and outcome-focused initiative to address safety concerns within Knox. To this end, Councillors signed a letter of endorsement on 11 September 2025 to Acting Inspector Darke, at Knox Police, for a Local Safety Committee to be established.

The LSC will be co-chaired by Victoria Police and Knox City Council and will have representatives from both Victoria Police and Knox City Council as well as other key stakeholders such as EACH, Infolink, Department of Justice, etc. The Committee will meet four times per year during business hours with the Terms of Reference to be approved at the first meeting.

It is proposed that two Councillors be nominated to sit on this Committee for a 12-month duration. As the first meeting of this Committee is on 20 November the nominations are required to take place prior to the usual process of committee allocation that occur annually.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to appoint two Councillors, being Councillor _____ and Councillor _____, as Council's representatives to the Local Safety Committee convened by Victoria Police effective from 20 November 2025 until 30 November 2026 or until Council resolves otherwise.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Atwell

SECONDED: Councillor Williams

That Council resolve:

- 1. Until such time as Council determines otherwise, the Mayor (or Acting Mayor) of the day and the Deputy Mayor of the day shall represent Council on the Local Safety Committee convened by Victoria Police;**
- 2. To seek an amendment to the Terms of Reference to enable any interested Councillor to attend the Local Safety Committee meetings as observers, recognising that community safety is a priority issue affecting all wards across Knox;**
- 3. To request that all Councillors receive:**
 - a) Meeting dates and Agendas for all Local Safety Committee meetings;**
 - b) Minutes and action items following each Meeting; and**
 - c) Twice-yearly briefings on local safety initiatives and outcomes arising from the Committee's work from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.**

CARRIED

4.5 Eastern Region Group of Councils

SUMMARY

Knox Council is a member of a number of regional groupings that comprise multiple Councils coming together in a formal way to work together and advocate for particular outcomes. These groupings include the Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG).

Council received a report at its meeting on 24 March 2025 in response to Notice of Motion 163 providing, in part, a summary of achievements of the ERG and the cost of membership. Council resolved at that meeting to receive a further report to a Council meeting enabling Council to re-evaluate its membership of ERG.

This report responds to the 24 March 2025 Council resolution and includes information on ERG and its activities during 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Receive and note this report including information on the Eastern Region Group of Councils and its activities during 2025.
2. Continue its membership of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Cooper

SECONDED: Councillor Lockwood

That Council resolve to:

1. **Receive and note this report including information on the Eastern Region Group of Councils and its activities during 2025.**
2. **Continue its membership of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.**

CARRIED

4.6 Audit and Risk Committee - Independent Member Appointment

SUMMARY

This report considers the outcome of the recruitment process for an Independent Member to the Audit and Risk Committee and recommends the appointment of the preferred candidate in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee's Charter.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Appoint the preferred candidate as set out in Confidential Attachment 1, to the Audit and Risk Committee for the period December 2025 to December 2028, in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee Charter.
2. Pursuant to Section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020, to authorise the confidential information in the attachments to this report to be publicly available for the limited purpose of communicating the effect of this Resolution to the extent necessary to give effect to it.
3. To authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person the Chief Executive Officer selects) to communicate the effect of these resolutions to the extent necessary at their discretion, including for the purpose of informing the community about the content of the report or Council's decision.
4. Acknowledge and thank Mr Geoff Harry for his contribution to Knox over the past five years as an Independent Member and Chair of the Knox Audit and Risk Committee.

Councillor Duncan left the Meeting at 8.45 pm during debate on Item 4.6 Audit and Risk Committee - Independent Member Appointment.

Councillor Duncan returned to the Meeting at 8.46 pm during debate and before the vote on Item 4.6 Audit and Risk Committee - Independent Member Appointment.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Pearce

SECONDED: Councillor Cooper

That Council resolve to:

1. **Appoint the preferred candidate as set out in Confidential Attachment 1, to the Audit and Risk Committee for the period December 2025 to December 2028, in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee Charter.**
2. **Pursuant to Section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020, to authorise the confidential information in the attachments to this report to be publicly available for the limited purpose of communicating the effect of this Resolution to the extent necessary to give effect to it.**
3. **To authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person the Chief Executive Officer selects) to communicate the effect of these resolutions to the extent necessary at their discretion, including for the purpose of informing the community about the content of the report or Council's decision.**

4. **Acknowledge and thank Mr Geoff Harry for his contribution to Knox over the past five years as an Independent Member and Chair of the Knox Audit and Risk Committee.**

CARRIED

5 Notices Of Motion

Nil.

6 Supplementary Items

6.1 Lease Agreement between Knox City Council and Scouts Victoria

SUMMARY

The Lease Agreement between Knox City Council and the Scout Association of Australia, Victorian Branch (Scouts Victoria) is currently overhauled and requires Council delegation to execute a new Lease Agreement/s. This report updates Council on the status of discussions between Council officers and Scouts Victoria, and seeks a Council decision to authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer delegates) to negotiate and execute the new Lease Agreement/s, within the parameters outlined in the report.

Scouts Victoria have been delivering the benefits of the Scouting movement for many years within the City of Knox. Individual Scout Groups were established and halls built across the municipality between 1958-1972 on Council land. Scouts Victoria constructed the buildings and are the owners of the buildings. The leases between Knox City Council and Scouts Victoria are known as “Land Leases,” and are for the land the Scout buildings have been built upon, and not the buildings.

Whilst there are 15 Scout sites across the municipality, this report is for 13 sites only. Eleven of the sites are on Council owned land and the two other sites Council manage on behalf of the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water. The Scout site at Heany Park is on a separate Agreement managed by Council’s Biodiversity Team, and it is anticipated that once endorsed this lease template will be used to execute the Heany Park site lease with some additional environmental considerations. An additional Scout site in Bayswater is situated on Vic Track land with the Lease managed by the Department of Transport.

Officers have been in discussions with Scouts Victoria for the future of the leases and the buildings built upon the land, within the Knox municipality. These discussions have progressed to the point where officers are now recommending the leases can be finalised.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Note that the relevant provisions of Section 115 of the Local Government Act 2020 regarding Lease of Land have been met.
2. Enter into Lease Agreement/s with Scouts Victoria for the eleven Scout Hall sites listed in this report which are on Council-owned land:
 - a. For the purpose of providing Scout related activities; and
 - b. With an annual rent payable of \$450 per site per annum, increasing by 4% on the annual anniversary of the Agreement, plus outgoings.
3. Enter into Lease Agreements with Scouts Victoria for the two Scout Hall sites for which Council is the manager of the land on behalf of the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water:
 - a. For the purpose of providing Scout related activities;
 - b. Using terms agreeable to the land-owners (noting these leases will need to be approved by the landowners); and
 - c. With an annual rent payable of \$450 per site per annum, increasing by 4% on the annual anniversary of the agreement, plus outgoings.
4. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates) to negotiate and execute the lease agreement/s for each site, generally in accordance with:
 - a. the above resolutions;
 - b. the officer recommendations in section 1 of the Officers' report;
 - c. the draft lease as outlined in Confidential Attachment 1; and
 - d. where applicable, the requirements of the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water as relevant land owners; with such minor or administrative changes considered necessary and appropriate at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee.
5. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates), pursuant to Section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020, to communicate the content of the Confidential Attachments for the limited purpose of communicating the effect of this resolution to the extent necessary at their discretion, including for the purpose of informing staff and the community about the content and/or Council decision.

RESOLUTION

MOVED: Councillor Cooper

SECONDED: Councillor Pearce

That Council resolve to:

1. Note that the relevant provisions of Section 115 of the Local Government Act 2020 regarding Lease of Land have been met.
2. Enter into Lease Agreement/s with Scouts Victoria for the eleven Scout Hall sites listed in this report which are on Council-owned land:
 - a. For the purpose of providing Scout related activities; and
 - b. With an annual rent payable of \$239 per site per annum, increasing by 4% on the annual anniversary of the Agreement, plus outgoings.
3. Enter into Lease Agreements with Scouts Victoria for the two Scout Hall sites for which Council is the manager of the land on behalf of the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water:
 - a. For the purpose of providing Scout related activities;
 - b. Using terms agreeable to the land-owners (noting these leases will need to be approved by the landowners); and
 - c. With an annual rent payable of \$239 per site per annum, increasing by 4% on the annual anniversary of the agreement, plus outgoings.
4. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates) to negotiate and execute the lease agreement/s for each site, generally in accordance with:
 - a. the above resolutions;
 - b. the officer recommendations in section 1 of the Officers' report;
 - c. the draft lease as outlined in Confidential Attachment 1; and
 - d. where applicable, the requirements of the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water as relevant land owners;

with such minor or administrative changes considered necessary and appropriate at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee.

5. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person as the Chief Executive Officer nominates), pursuant to Section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020, to communicate the content of the Confidential Attachments for the limited purpose of communicating the effect of this resolution to the extent necessary at their discretion, including for the purpose of informing staff and the community about the content and/or Council decision.

CARRIED

A Division was called by Councillor Atwell

For the motion: Councillor Kennett, Councillor Atwell, Councillor Considine, Councillor Cooper, Councillor Duncan, Councillor Williams, Councillor Lockwood, and Councillor Pearce

Against the motion: Nil

Abstentions: Nil

CARRIED 8:0

7 Urgent Business

7.1 Urgent Business

Nil.

8 Confidential Items

Nil.

Before closing the Meeting, the Chairperson, Councillor Cooper, noted that it was her last meeting as Mayor and acknowledged Councillors and Council officers for their support and collaboration, and thanked the community for its ongoing engagement. The Mayor noted that it has been an honour and privilege to serve in the role of Mayor and expressed appreciation to fellow Councillors for the opportunity to lead Council and community.

The Mayor also noted that Remembrance Day was on 11 November, encouraging all to pause at 11 am to reflect on the courage, service, and sacrifice of those who have served, including those who lost their lives, those who returned carrying the impacts of conflict, and the families and communities who continue to bear this legacy.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9:10pm

Minutes of Meeting confirmed at the
Mid Month Meeting of Council
held on Monday, 8 December 2025

.....
Chairperson

The Agenda for this meeting is attached in full at the end of the Minutes

AGENDA

Mid Month Meeting of Council

To be held at the

Civic Centre

511 Burwood Highway

Wantirna South

On

Monday 10 November 2025 at 7:00 PM

This meeting will be conducted as a hybrid meeting

knox
your city



Order of Business

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Bruce Dobson
Chief Executive Officer

1 Apologies And Requests For Leaves Of Absence

2 Declarations Of Conflict Of Interest

3 Confirmation Of Minutes

Confirmation of Minutes of Mid Month Meeting of Council on Monday 13 October 2025

4 Officer Reports

4.1 Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund 2025-26 Monthly Report

Final Report Destination:	Mid-Month Council
Paper Type:	For Decision
Author	Community Grants Officer, Bryony Lee
Manager:	Manager Community Strengthening, Kerry Jansons
Executive:	Director Connected Communities, Judy Chalkley

SUMMARY

This report summarises the grant applications recommended for approval in November 2025 for the 2025-26 Minor Grants Program and Emergency Relief Fund. All applications have been assessed against the criteria set out in the Knox City Council Community Grants Guidelines 2025-2026 (Guidelines).

Applications under the Minor Grants Program are limited to a maximum of \$2,500.00 within the current financial year.

Applications under the Emergency Relief Fund are limited to \$20,000.00 within the current financial year.

This report also includes more information on Community Development Fund Application “2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club”. This application was discussed at the 27 October 2025 Meeting of Council and further information was requested to understand why the application was unsuccessful.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Approve two applications under the Minor Grants Program for a total of 2,203.23 (excluding GST) as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program				
Applicant Name	Project Title	10% Contribution for Equipment	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
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Total			\$2,369.55	\$2,203.23

2. Defer one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program			
Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Deferral	Amount Requested
One Hope Community Church	Outdoor Blinds for Community@Cavell	Waiting for additional information	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

3. Refuse one application under the Minor Grants Program requesting a total of \$2,500.00 as detailed below:

Minor Grants Program			
Applicant Name	Project Title	Reason for Ineligibility	Amount Requested
Restore Community Care	Restoring Broken Lives	Duplicate application – the same project has been applied for under the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) this month. The project has been recommended for funding under ERF.	\$2,500.00
Total			\$2,500.00

4. Note that should the recommended Minor Grants be approved by Council, the remaining budget for 2025-26 will be \$99,842.38 after GST adjustments.
5. Approve one application under the Emergency Relief Fund for a total of \$11,531.81 (excluding GST) as detailed below:

Emergency Relief Fund				
Applicant Name	Project Title	Co-contribution from the Organisation	Amount Requested (inc. GST)	Amount Recommended (excl. GST)
Restore Community Care	Filling Plates, Filling Hearts Funding is being sought to provide short-term emergency relief to the community who are in urgent need of assistance.	Total project cost \$20,000.00, including \$7,000.00 contribution from organisation	\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81 (lesser amount due to budget being exhausted)
Total			\$13,000.00	\$11,531.81

6. Note that should the recommended grant be approved by Council, the Emergency Relief Fund budget for 2025-26 will be exhausted with no budget remaining.
7. Note the information provided in relation to the Community Development Fund Application 2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club and uphold the Community Development Fund Assessment Panel's decision to decline this application.

1. DISCUSSION

1.1 Minor Grants Program

1.1.1 Background – Minor Grants Program

The Minor Grants Program provides a pool of grant funding that can respond monthly to requests for small amounts of funding to assist with short term, one-off projects or initiatives that are relatively minor in nature.

The objective of the Minor Grants Program is to be an accessible and responsive funding source to assist a wide range of community led activities across the municipality and support volunteer effort and civic participation.

It operates under the principles of other Knox Council grants programs to ensure:

- Funded projects will provide benefit to the Knox community and help meet Council objectives;
- Co-operation and collaboration between groups will be encouraged;
- The grant process will be consistent, equitable and transparent; and
- The grant process will support and strengthen community groups in developing local solutions to local needs.

Applications are assessed against criteria specified in the Community Grants Guidelines (approved in May 2025), to determine the eligibility of the applicant organisation and the eligibility of the grant application.

The Guidelines and Council's Grant Framework Policy set out an open and transparent grant program that meets the principles of good governance and is compliant with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.

In accordance with the Guidelines, applications for funding have been assessed by the Chief Executive Officer, or delegate, for Council's approval.

This report presents to Council the recommendations for recent Minor Grant applications in accordance with the Guidelines.

1.1.2 Applications Recommended for Approval – Minor Grants Program

Four applications have been assessed this month, requesting grants totaling \$7,369.55 (including GST). Of the four applications, two are recommended for approval. A summary of the projects recommended is in Attachment 1.

1.1.3 Applications Recommended for Deferral – Minor Grants Program

One application is recommended for deferral to the December 2025 Mid-Month Meeting of Council as we await further information regarding their application:

- One Home Community Church – Outdoor Blinds for Community@Cavell.

This group will be encouraged to provide the additional information prior to the deadline for the December 2025 Mid-Month Meeting of Council.

1.1.4 Applications Recommended for Refusal – Minor Grants Program

One application is recommended for refusal, requesting a grant totaling \$2,500.00:

- Restore Community Care’s ‘Restoring Broken Lives’ project was submitted under both the Minor Grant Program and the Emergency Relief Fund. As this was the same project applied for under both streams, per the Guidelines, this was deemed a duplicate application. The project has been recommended for approval under the Emergency Relief Fund as this is a better outcome for the community group and suited the eligibility of the ERF guidelines.

1.2 Emergency Relief Fund

1.2.1 Background – Emergency Relief Fund

The Emergency Relief Fund addresses short-term, essential support needs for Knox residents by providing better support to local organisations that provide these services. This includes food, bedding, clothing, vouchers, medication and other vital services that address immediate and essential needs of individuals requiring support in Knox.

It operates under the same principles as other Knox Council grants programs to ensure:

- Funded projects will provide benefit to the Knox community and help meet Council objectives;
- Co-operation and collaboration between groups will be encouraged;
- The grant process will be consistent, equitable and transparent; and
- The grant process will support and strengthen community groups in developing local solutions to local needs.

Applications are assessed against criteria specified in the Community Grants Guidelines.

The Guidelines and Council’s Grant Framework Policy set out an open and transparent grant program that meets the principles of good governance and is compliant with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.

In accordance with the Guidelines, applications for funding have been assessed by the Chief Executive Officer, or delegate, for Council’s approval.

This report presents to Council the recommendations for recent Emergency Relief Fund applications in accordance with the Guidelines.

1.2.2 Applications Recommended for Approval – Emergency Relief Fund

One application has been assessed this month, requesting a grant totaling \$13,000.00. The application is recommended for approval. However, as the amount remaining in the ERF budget is \$11,531.81, the amount recommended has been reduced to match this figure, resulting in the ERF budget allocation being exhausted for 25/26. A summary of the project recommended is in Attachment 2.

1.3 Community Development Fund Application 2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club

At its meeting on Monday 27 October, Council discussed the Community Development Fund 2025-26 Report. The recommendations within this report were supported by Council, however, further information was requested on one application. The information is in relation to application 2526-CDF-118 Ferntree Gully Falcons Basketball Club. The Community Development Fund Assessment Panel recommended that this application be declined due to ineligible expenditure items that were not aligned to the Community Grant Guidelines.

The application asked for shelving that was deemed a fixed asset as per the quote provided, and this was not eligible for funding as per the Guidelines. The applicant also asked for signage however there was not enough information provided to determine if this was wayfinding or advertising therefore was deemed ineligible. The applicant also indicated on the application form that they would not accept partial funding of the grant therefore as some of the items were ineligible the application was denied. The Panel recommended that Club apply for minor grants if they wished to pursue other eligible items.

2. ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is undertaken with organisations in relation to their grant applications whenever possible and if necessary, to clarify details regarding their applications prior to Council's consideration.

Advice or information may be sought from Officers across Council in relation to either the applying organisation or the proposed project, or both, if considered necessary.

The Guidelines specify assessment can occur by the Chief Executive Officer, or delegate, and make recommendation for Council's determination.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Minor Grants Program allows Council to respond promptly to requests from Knox- based community groups for small amounts of funding to assist a variety of community-based programs, projects or activities. Council's Minor Grants are a simple and streamlined source of funding that can make a significant difference for local community organisations in need of short-term, specific purpose assistance.

The Emergency Relief Fund addresses short-term, essential support needs for Knox residents by providing better support to local organisations that provide these services. This includes food, bedding, clothing, vouchers, medication and other vital services that address immediate and essential needs of individuals requiring support in Knox.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the recommendation is considered to have no direct implications or has no direct impacts upon Council's Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040, exposure to climate risks or climate change adaptation.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no environmental considerations associated with this report.

6. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Budget – Minor Grants Program

The approval of Minor Grants is managed within Council's adopted budget. The 2025-26 budget provides \$156,696.00 for the Minor Grants Program.

Funding commitments to date are summarised below:

Yearly Summary 2025-26	Total Amount Approved at Council Meeting (Excluding GST)
July	\$13,039.83
August	\$14,174.01
September	\$12,606.00
October	\$14,830.55
November	\$
December	\$
January	\$
February	\$
March	\$
April	\$
May	\$
Totals (Year to Date)	\$54,650.39

Recommended applications for the November period total \$2,203.23 (excluding GST).

If approved as recommended, the remaining Minor Grants budget for 2025-26 will total \$99,842.38 (excluding GST).

6.2 Budget – Emergency Relief Fund

The approval of the Emergency Relief Fund is managed within Council's adopted budget. The 2025-26 budget provides \$100,000.00 for the Fund.

Funding commitments to date are summarised below:

Yearly Summary 2025-26	Total Amount Approved at Council Meeting (Excluding GST)
July	\$18,181.82
August	\$59,377.28
September	\$10,909.09
October	No Applications Received
November	\$
December	\$
January	\$
February	\$
March	\$
April	\$
May	\$
Totals (Year to Date)	\$88,468.19

Recommended applications for the November period total 11,531.81 (excluding GST).

If approved as recommended, the remaining Emergency Relief Fund budget for 2025-26 will total \$0.00 and this will conclude the program.

7. RISKS

Any risks associated with administering the Minor Grant Program, Emergency Relief Fund and Excellence Grants for Individuals Program are managed through the implementation of Council's Grant Framework Policy and the Guidelines. All Minor Grants and Emergency Relief Fund grants must be acquitted, and evidence of expenditure must be provided by the organisation.

The Guidelines and Council's Grant Framework Policy set out an open and transparent grant program that meets the principles of good governance and is compliant with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.

In accordance with the Guidelines, applications for funding have been assessed by the Chief Executive Officer, or their delegate, for Council or delegate approval as appropriate.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

Enhancing community connection to vital services and resources

Strategy 1.2 - Our community can access diverse training and life-long learning opportunities through delivery, promotion and partnerships with relevant organisations.

Strategy 1.4 - Access to affordable and nutritious food is enhanced through advocacy and working in partnership with relevant organisations to raise awareness and promote available community programs.

Embracing connection, inclusion and diversity

Strategy 2.1 - Our community's diverse needs are addressed by ensuring equity and inclusion are considered in decision making and strategic planning.

Strategy 2.3 - Our community is supported to thrive during all stages of life through the promotion and provision of services, advocacy and partnerships with local service providers.

Strategy 2.4 - There are opportunities for social connection and active living through planning, provision of facilities, program delivery and support for local groups.

Leading, listening and governing responsibly

Strategy 4.1 - Council demonstrates its accountability through transparent and responsible decision-making and working together productively.

Strategy 4.2 - Our diverse community is informed and has opportunities to participate and provide feedback through clear and meaningful communication and engagement,

Strategy 4.3 - Council services are efficient and optimised through ongoing improvement, and focused investment in innovation, technology and capability.

Strategy 4.4 - The changing needs of our community are met through informed policy and strategy that maximises value, collaboration and partnerships with other councils and local organisations.

Strategy 4.5 - Council is financially sustainable through long-term strategic, financial and asset planning, and the responsible prioritisation, allocation and use of resources.

Being a strong voice for safety

Strategy 5.3 - Our community is more secure, connected and feel less isolated through planning, partnerships, advocacy and targeted support for our most vulnerable.

Strategy 5.4 - People feel safe in their homes and in the community through the development of partnerships, planning and promotion of programs, services and education that focus on connection, safety and respect.

Strategy 5.5 - Our community is resilient in the face of emergencies through planning, education, emergency response and support.

Planning our future city

Strategy 6.1 - There is improved access to a diverse range of housing options through effective planning, advocacy, and identifying opportunities for social and affordable housing supply.

Strategy 6.2 - High quality, integrated community services and facilities are available through planning and design that responds to population growth and our community's changing needs.

Strategy 6.3 - Our community's expectations and aspirations for housing development and land use are considered through planning, advocacy, partnerships and decision making.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no content in this report that meets the definition of confidential information from the Local Government Act 2020.

Attachments

1. Attachment 1 Minor Grants Program Application Extraction November 2025 [**4.1.1** - 4 pages]
2. Attachment 2 Emergency Relief Grant Program Application Extraction November [**4.1.2** - 2 pages]

Minor Grant Program Applications
November 2025

Attachment 1

2526-MGP082

2nd/3rd Bayswater Scout Group

Application ID	2526-MGP082
Organisation Name	2nd/3rd Bayswater Scout Group
Grant Program	Minor Grants Program

Project Title	From Plates to People: Strengthening Community Through Shared Meals
Project Start Date	15/12/2025
Project End Date	31/01/2026

Request Details	<p>Our Scout Hall is a vital community hub, providing a welcoming space for our Scout Group and the wider community to gather for regular events and shared meals. The replacement of our kitchen crockery, cutlery, and utensils will enhance our ability to host these activities and offer a more attractive, functional space for hall hire. This improvement will also help us maintain some of the lowest membership fees in the area by increasing hall use and supporting ongoing sustainability.</p> <p>Our Group is committed to continuing our whole-group dinners throughout the year—events that foster engagement, belonging, and community spirit. Our most recent dinner welcomed over 100 attendees and showcased the strong sense of connection and pride within our Scout community. With upgraded kitchen resources, we can continue to deliver these inclusive events and ensure our hall remains a place where people come together to share food, friendship, and community.</p>		
Community Benefit	<p>Upgrading the kitchen crockery, cutlery, and utensils will increase the appeal and functionality of our Scout Hall for community hire. A better-equipped kitchen will attract more local events and gatherings, generating income that helps the Group maintain low membership fees for families. This ensures Scouting remains accessible and affordable while providing the broader community with a welcoming, well-resourced venue for connection and celebration.</p>		
Total Beneficiaries	100	Total Project Cost	\$2,012.50
Knox Beneficiaries	100	Total Amount Requested	\$1,829.55

Total Project Income

Income Description	Income Amount
Council Grant	\$ 1,829.55
Cash Contribution	\$ 182.95
Total Income	\$ 2,012.50

Minor Grant Program Applications
November 2025

Total Project Expenditure

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount
Cutlery/Crockery	\$ 1,140.50
Utensils/ Table Clothes	\$ 249.00
Stay sharp Knives	\$ 123.00
Miscellaneous extras	\$ 500.00
Total Expenditure	\$ 2,012.50

What specifically the grant is funding

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount	10% Co-Contribution Requirement (only if requesting equipment)	Co-Contribution Reflected in Project Income?
Cutlery, crockery, utensils, tablecloths	\$ 1,829.55	\$ 182.95	Yes
Total Grant Expenditure	\$ 1,829.55	\$ 182.95 - minimum amount required	\$ 182.95 – meets minimum required

Minor Grant Program Applications
November 2025

2526-MGP083

Knox Obedience Dog Club Inc.

Application ID	2526-MGP083
Organisation Name	Knox Obedience Dog Club Inc.
Grant Program	Minor Grants Program

Project Title	Connecting Knox Through Responsible Dog Ownership
Project Start Date	20/11/2025
Project End Date	31/03/2026

Request Details	Knox Obedience Dog Club (KODC) seeks funding to print and distribute 20,000 double-sided DL flyers as part of a one-off community engagement and education campaign across the City of Knox. The flyers will promote responsible dog ownership, encourage active lifestyles, and invite residents to participate in our volunteer-run training programs. They will showcase KODC’s long-standing presence in Knox, our not-for-profit nature, and our diverse range of dog sports - including obedience, agility, rally, and tracking - which foster an active sporting culture rather than a post-obedience “sit-at-home” approach. Flyers will be distributed via Council facilities (if acceptable), libraries, pet stores, vet clinics, and community events such as Pets in the Park. Printing and distribution will be completed within four months of funding approval, helping strengthen community awareness, inclusion, and participation in healthy, outdoor activities with dogs.		
Community Benefit	This project promotes community wellbeing, safety, and connection by raising awareness of KODC’s volunteer-run programs that teach responsible dog ownership and encourage outdoor participation. Through training in disciplines such as agility, rally, tracking, and obedience, KODC helps residents stay active, develop new skills, and join a supportive community centred on teamwork and respect for animals. By engaging dog owners beyond basic obedience, we foster a sporting culture that supports mental and physical health for both dogs and people. Increased participation reduces nuisance behaviours, enhances safety in public spaces, and promotes harmonious park use. The flyers will reach a wide audience, including new residents, encouraging them to connect, volunteer, and stay active locally. The project directly supports Knox Council’s goal of a healthy, inclusive, and connected community through participation, education, and shared wellbeing.		
Total Beneficiaries	1000-1500	Total Project Cost	\$ 605.00
Knox Beneficiaries	1000-1500	Total Amount Requested	\$ 540.00

Total Project Income

Income Description	Income Amount
Council grant	\$ 540.00
Knox Obedience Dog Club	\$ 65.00
Total Income	\$ 605.00

Minor Grant Program Applications
November 2025

Total Project Expenditure

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount
Printing of DL Flyers	\$ 605.00
Total Expenditure	\$ 605.00

What specifically the grant is funding

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount	10% Co-Contribution Requirement (only if requesting equipment)	Co-Contribution Reflected in Project Income?
Printing of DL Flyers - Snap Printing	\$ 540.00	N/A	N/A
Total Grant Expenditure	\$ 540.00	N/A	N/A

Emergency Relief Fund Application

November 2025

Attachment 2

2526-ERF013

Restore Community Care

Application ID	2526-ERF013
Organisation Name	Restore Community Care
Grant Program	Emergency Relief Fund

Project Title	Filling Plates, Filling Hearts
Project Start Date	25/11/2025
Project End Date	24/11/2026

Request Details	Restore Community Care seeks additional financial support to be able to provide short-term emergency food relief to the Community who are in urgent need of assistance.		
Community Benefit	The people are so appreciative of whatever assistance we can provide through this program. We have seen this through tears of joy on their faces when they come in and receive assistance. They have shared with us how helpful the food donations have been, which enables them to be able to settle other outstanding bills and payments.		
Demonstration of need	There has been an increase in homelessness, and families struggling to make ends meet, due to financial hardship and job losses. Through Restore Community Care help the people through food donations and toiletries, which can be very expensive to purchase from the supermarkets and grocery stores.		
Total Beneficiaries	600	Total Project Cost	\$ 20,000.00
Knox Beneficiaries	80%	Total Amount Requested	\$ 13,000.00

Total Project Income

Income Description	Income Amount
Council Grant	\$ 13,000.00
Restore Community Care	\$ 7,000.00
Total Income	\$ 20,000.00

Total Project Expenditure

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount
Grocery Supplies & Toiletries	\$ 20,000.00
Total Expenditure	\$ 20,000.00

Emergency Relief Fund Application

November 2025

What specifically the grant is funding

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Amount	10% Co-Contribution Requirement (only if requesting equipment)	Co-Contribution Reflected in Project Income?
Grocery Supplies & Toiletries	\$ 12,684.99 *	N/A	N/A
Total Grant Expenditure	\$ 12,684.99	N/A	N/A

* Lesser amount than what's being requested due to budget being exhausted

4.2 Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 - Mid-Term Review

Final Report Destination:	Council
Paper Type:	For Noting
Author:	Social Policy and Advocacy Officer, Marisa Lo Bartolo
Manager:	Manager Community Strengthening, Kerryn Jansons
Executive:	Director Connected Communities, Judy Chalkley

SUMMARY

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027 (the Strategy) was approved by Council in April 2023. The Strategy outlines Council's role in, and commitment to, supporting our community in accessing safe and secure housing. Council's approach recognises the importance of partnering with other tiers of government to support residents. The Strategy acknowledges that whilst local government can facilitate elements of increasing social and affordable housing, funding and management essentially rests with the State Government and the community housing sector.

This report provides a mid-way review of key achievements, case studies, progress against each of the actions, and opportunities for the remainder of the implementation period.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to receive and note this mid-term review of the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027.

1. DISCUSSION

1.1. Purpose and Background

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027 demonstrates Council's commitment to increasing the supply of social and affordable housing within the municipality, recognising that having secure and affordable housing changes lives. It also sets out actions Council is taking to address challenges in the housing and homelessness space. The availability of affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing is the foundation for people to fully participate in the social, economic and community aspects of life.

The Strategy contains 28 actions across three strategic focus areas listed below. These were developed in consultation with key stakeholders to understand community needs and local challenges:

- Planning and Regulation;
- Advocacy and Targeted Support; and
- Collaboration and Partnerships.

This mid-term review provides an overview of the work that Council has achieved in the first two years of the Strategy. The coordinated approach that Council is taking is seen through the range of teams working in this space, including:

- Community Strengthening;
- City Futures;
- City Planning and Building;
- Community Access and Support;
- Strategic Procurement and Property; and
- City Safety and Health.

1.2. Context and Data

Since the launch of the Strategy, Council has been impacted by a range of reforms and policy changes led by the Victorian State Government. These include the release of the Housing Statement, which outlines housing targets and strategic directions, as well as amendments to consumer and planning legislation and several Planning Scheme changes.

New rental laws have also come into effect, introducing a range of protections for renters such as extended notice periods and minimum safety standards for rental properties. At the same time, the housing and homelessness services sector continues to face significant challenges, including a complex funding environment and ongoing cost-of-living pressures, which have placed considerable strain on services.

Data from the past two years highlights the continued need for action in this space. According to the 2021 Census, 10.3% of households in Knox were experiencing housing stress, which is defined as spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs. There is a severe shortage of affordable housing options for people on very low and low incomes, both for rent and purchase.

While there has been a reduction in the number of people on the Victorian Housing Register, both Census and Council data indicate rising rates of homelessness in the community. This ongoing need requires sustained and coordinated action, including advocacy for increased social and affordable housing supply, strengthening local partnerships and service integration, improving access to support services, and continuing to monitor and respond to emerging housing trends and pressures.

A more detailed overview of the context and supporting data is provided in Attachment 1.

1.3. Progress Summary

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy addresses a range of challenges surrounding safe, secure and affordable housing. The Strategy has been developed and reviewed with an understanding of the role Council plays in addressing these challenges.

Overall, the Strategy actions are on track with 93% of Actions either On Schedule or Completed. A full progress update is provided as Attachment 1 to this report:

Completed	*	3	Progress against this Action item has been completed. Reporting against this Action item will not be required for future reporting periods.
On Schedule	▶	23	Progress against an Action item is fully on track for this reporting period of July 2022 to June 2025. Reporting will continue for this Action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Not Started	■	1	This Action item has not been started in the identified time due to reasons described in the progress comments. Reporting will continue for this Action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Proposed to be closed	●	1	This Action has not been progressed as there have been external factors impeding development. It is proposed that this Action should be closed and not be required for future reporting periods.
TOTAL		28	

Details of the two Actions listed as not started or proposed to be closed are listed below:

- Action 1.11: “Continue to plan for and support diverse housing to meet changing community needs through a review of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023–2027” has not yet started. This is in alignment with the Strategy’s implementation timeline, which schedules this Action to begin in Year 5; and
- Action 3.8: “Work with the Municipal Association of Victoria to support the development of a Local Government compact with Homes Victoria” has been proposed to be closed. This is due to the Local Government Compact being in draft form when the Strategy was written, however, the Compact never progressed further. The Municipal Association of Victoria continues to advocate for increased Social and Affordable housing and developed a position statement to this effect.

1.4. Key Highlights – Case Studies

A review of the Strategy was undertaken with an update provided on each Action (see Attachment 1). Below are a series of case studies that illustrate key achievements over the previous two years, including:

<p>Debra’s Story - Supporting People Experiencing Homelessness</p>	<p>Action 2.3 - Implement the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Policy and Procedure to provide direction for decision making and management processes in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in the Knox municipality.</p> <p>Debra^{1*}, 50, had been living in her car on Council reserve land, using public facilities to shower and wash clothes. After an incident involving aggressive behaviour toward contracted Council cleaners, Council officers conducted a risk assessment and spoke with Debra. With her</p>
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¹ *Name has been changed for anonymity

	<p>consent, she was referred to the Council’s Short-Term Support (STS) Team.</p> <p>Debra disclosed that she had been living in her car for six years, had a history of family violence, had lost custody of her children and that her mental health was declining. A rough sleeping notification was submitted and a referral was made to The Salvation Army Outreach Team, recommending that Debra be considered for the Homes First Program.</p> <p>Debra gave her consent to be referred to Uniting, Knox’s crisis housing entry point, and the only organisation authorised to refer individuals to the Homes First Program. Debra’s referral was shortlisted for the Program, which selects participants through a Panel process. With Debra’s consent, the STS Team requested to participate in the Panel to advocate on her behalf.</p> <p>Debra was successfully selected for the Program that has very limited spot available in the Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities. Through the Program, Debra will receive priority housing and three years of intensive, wraparound case management.</p>
<p>Boral Quarry Development – Navigating Planning Reforms</p>	<p>Action 1.2 - Using the principles outlined in Appendix 1 of this Strategy, negotiate with developers for a voluntary 5% contribution of social housing in private land developments including strategic investigation sites where rezoning is required.</p> <p>In 2020, the Boral site located at 191 George Street, Wantirna South, was initially lodged directly with Council for assessment. As a rare 60-hectare infill development opportunity, Council identified it as a priority project. In line with the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy, Council was seeking a 5% social and affordable housing contribution as a condition of rezoning. To do this, a Section 173 Agreement was prepared and an Affordable Housing Framework also submitted to Council, however, negotiations were stalled over key issues including biodiversity concerns related to site access.</p> <p>As a result, the developer decided to bypass Council, opting for Ministerial rezoning via the Department of Transport and Planning’s Development Facilitation Unit (DFU). This fast-tracked process increased the affordable housing contribution to 10%, but removed the explicit requirement for social housing, raising concerns about long-term affordability.</p> <p>During this process, Council’s direct influence over the project has reduced, including influence over how and where any financial contributions would be spent. Council has formally advocated for funds to remain in Knox and this advocacy remains ongoing.</p>

	<p>In August 2025, the Minister referred the proposal to the Priority Projects Standing Advisory Committee (SAC), with a hearing scheduled for October 2025. The SAC will consider Council’s concerns, including the affordable housing contribution, with a final decision from the Minister is expected later this year.</p>
<p>Joe’s Story - Supporting Service System Navigation and Access to Housing</p>	<p>Action 2.6 - Continue to support older persons (over 55 years) who are at risk of homelessness by providing the housing support service and guiding the application of Council’s nomination rights over designated older persons sites of public housing within the Knox municipality.</p> <p>Joe^{2*}, 57, presented to Council’s Housing Support Officer in urgent need of safe, affordable housing. He had a history of experiencing homelessness and was living in a private rental that lacked electricity and gas, making it uninhabitable under tenancy standards. Ongoing issues with the landlord led to multiple Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hearings, where Joe received legal support from Justice Connect after a referral.</p> <p>Joe’s housing instability had caused significant trauma, including Complex PTSD, depression and anxiety, which made consistent engagement with services challenging. In response, the Housing Support Officer took several steps to assist Joe, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitting a Public Housing Application; • Liaising with legal representatives; • Connecting Joe with Uniting for housing support, Knox Infolink for material aid and meals, and mental health services; and • Sought long-term, affordable housing options. <p>These efforts led to Joe’s Public Housing Application being approved. He received ongoing legal support, reconnected with his GP and psychologist, and was successfully linked with essential services. Through Council’s nomination process, Joe was offered and accepted a long-term affordable public housing placement.</p>
<p>Community Housing Developments in Knox Part 1 – Community Housing Limited</p>	<p>Action 3.3 - Further consult with registered community housing providers to determine their preferred delivery and partnership models for working with Council.</p> <p>A new social housing development in Wantirna South, near the Knox Civic Centre, was delivered by Community Housing Limited (CHL) under Homes Victoria’s Social Housing Growth Fund. The project includes 118 dwellings, with 66 one-bedroom and 52 two-bedroom apartments, all designated as social housing. Seventy-five percent of allocations were drawn from the Victorian Housing Register’s Priority Access Waitlist.</p>

² *Name has been changed for anonymity

	<p>Council’s Housing Support Officer engaged with 44 eligible residents over 55 years-old, resulting in 21 being successfully housed in the CHL development. Others were either housed elsewhere, declined the offer, or were unsuccessful.</p> <p>Community engagement began six months before the site’s opening. CHL formed an Activation Group with Council teams and local organisations to support new residents. Monthly meetings led to initiatives such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A welcome BBQ with Council teams sharing resources on health, family violence, and emergency relief; • English language support and cultural connections via Council’s Multicultural Partnerships Officer; • Early Years staff attending playgroups to offer referrals and support; • A Coffee Club “pop-up op shop” providing clothing and engagement opportunities; and • Grant information shared by Council. <p>This collaborative approach helped integrate residents into the community and build lasting connections between Council and CHL.</p>
<p>Community Housing Developments in Knox Part 2 – Impact of Housing</p>	<p>Action 2.5 - Actively support and advocate for initiatives that engage with residents living in public and social housing to build community connections and resilience to prevent homelessness through the provision of appropriate support services.</p> <p>As a part of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy mid-term review, Council officers engaged with Community Housing Limited and residents of the community housing apartments to hear about their experiences. Officers attended the weekly Coffee Club to introduce two engagement activities aimed at gathering resident feedback. They returned the following week to collect responses.</p> <p>One activity involved a poster where residents placed stickers next to life areas positively impacted by housing. A total of 198 stickers were placed, with financial security receiving the most stickers, followed by mental health, feeling safe and secure, greater sense of independence, and sense of self. This highlighted how secure housing enables broader life improvements.</p> <p>The second activity was a “Letter Box” for residents to share personal stories. One resident shared their story, illustrating systemic challenges and the importance of lived experience in advocacy:</p> <p>“I applied for public housing in 2006 for my son and myself. My son was 2 years old. We have been on the waitlist for 19 years! As my son doesn’t want to live so far away from uni and public transport I had to</p>

	<p>downgrade to a one-bedroom apartment even though my son struggles with mental health issues and is unsupported living with his father. I do not understand why we were on the waitlist for 19 years without any communication from VHR.”</p> <p>Residents also shared suggestions of things they would like to see, including community gathering spaces, environmental features, better parking, and more engagement opportunities. These themes reflect the importance of community connection and accessibility once stable housing is secured.</p> <p>These engagement activities demonstrate the mix of positive impacts and ongoing challenges that people living in community housing face.</p>
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1.5. Key Successes and Opportunities

In the first two years of delivery on the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy, key successes have included:

- The Strategy’s cross-Council actions have established a coordinated approach to addressing social and affordable housing;
- Partnerships with other local Councils through various alliances and groups have enabled collaborative work on joint advocacy and awareness raising campaigns;
- The mid-term review confirms progress across all strategic focus areas;
- New systems have been embedded to streamline processes and keep social and affordable housing as an organisational priority;
- The introduction of a cross-Council reporting system (Pulse) has enhanced monitoring and accountability, providing a central platform for annual progress reporting; and
- This structured reporting supports ongoing advocacy by strengthening Councils evidence base and highlighting emerging opportunities.

Over the remaining two years of the Strategy, the following priorities have been identified to support and strengthen delivery of the Strategy’s actions:

- Align this Strategy with the new Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–2029, ensuring its actions are prioritised in annual action plans;
- Embed an intersectional approach across all actions, beginning with a review of the Equity Impact Assessment conducted as part of this mid-term review, and adding equity as a standing agenda item for the Social and Affordable Housing Implementation Group (detailed below); and
- Recognise that some actions rely on external funding and place a stronger emphasis on identifying and securing these resources to enable delivery over the remainder of the Strategy.

1.6. Equity Impact Assessment

An Equity Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken in the development of the Social and Affordable Housing Mid-Term Review. As a result of the EIA, the following recommendations have been incorporated into the Review:

- A more detailed explanation of how different identities intersect and impact an individual's experience included in Attachment 1 under 'Cohorts in Need';
- Demonstrating the lived experience of distinct genders in the case studies, reflecting what is demonstrated by data; and
- Including the opportunity to progress this work further by embedding an intersectional approach across all actions, continuing to ensure we apply an equity lens to this work.

2. ENGAGEMENT

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy was developed through consultation and engagement with the Knox community, including Council Advisory Committees, key housing organisations, State Government, peak bodies, lived experience networks and Council staff. There is ongoing engagement occurring to guide the implementation of the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and its actions.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Mid Term Review of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy highlights the positive social impacts of housing work in Knox. It reinforces that priority groups such as people experiencing homelessness, women and children, people with disability, older people, First Nations people, and single men with complex needs are disproportionately affected by housing insecurity. Actions undertaken as part of the Strategy increase opportunities for participation and social inclusion.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the recommendation is considered to have no direct implications or has no direct impacts upon Council's Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040, exposure to climate risks or climate change adaptation.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy is funded within existing operational budgets and staff resources. Some actions within the Strategy are reliant on access to external funding. Prioritisation and sourcing external funding to support and strengthen Councils commitment will need to be a key focus in the remaining years of the Strategy.

7. RISKS

Risks associated with the delivery of actions included in the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy are considered by the responsible Departments as part of the project management process when implemented. A range of related legislative and policy considerations are identified in Appendix 1 of the Action Plan.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

Enhancing community connection to vital services and resources

Strategy 1.5 - Our community's health and wellbeing is improved through proactive planning, delivery, partnerships and advocacy that enable access to services, education and programs.

Embracing connection, inclusion and diversity

Strategy 2.1 - Our community's diverse needs are addressed by ensuring equity and inclusion are considered in decision making and strategic planning.

Being a strong voice for safety

Strategy 5.3 - Our community is more secure, connected and feel less isolated through planning, partnerships, advocacy and targeted support for our most vulnerable.

Planning our future city

Strategy 6.1 - There is improved access to a diverse range of housing options through effective planning, advocacy, and identifying opportunities for social and affordable housing supply.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no content in this report that meets the definition of confidential information from the Local Government Act 2020.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - Final - Issues Briefing - Social and Affordable Housing Strategy Mid Term Review - 20 [4.2.1 - 47 pages]

knox



Attachment 1

Housing Changes Lives: Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2022-27 Mid-Term Review

September 2025



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1. Introduction

Housing Changes Lives: Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2023–27 (the Strategy) was developed and released in 2022-23. It outlines Council's role in, and commitment to, supporting our community in accessing safe and secure housing. Council's approach recognises the importance of partnering with other tiers of government to support residents. Whilst local government can facilitate elements of increasing social and affordable housing, funding and management essentially rests with the State Government and the community housing sector.

This mid-term review provides an overview of the work that Council has achieved in the first two years of the Strategy. It highlights the collaborative effort across Council departments that is needed to undertake this work. This Review will cover a background of the Strategy, provide a context update, key data insights, give an overview of priority cohorts identified in the Strategy, and highlight case studies that demonstrate some of the achievements of this work. Successes and opportunities have also been highlighted, and Appendix 1 provides detailed progress comments on the 28 Actions of the Strategy.

This mid-term review demonstrates that housing is a complex space for Council to work in and highlights the continual need for dedicated work in this space to strengthen partnerships, with the shared goal to support community housing needs.

1.1 Background

Knox City Council is committed to increasing the supply of social and affordable housing within the municipality, recognising having secure and affordable housing changes lives. The availability of affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing is the foundation for people to fully participate in the social, economic and community aspects of life.

When housing is secure and adequate there is a significant positive impact on health, employment, and education. Knox City Council has a proud history of supporting housing for people experiencing vulnerability, including the donation of five parcels of land in the 1960s for the development of housing for older people. Council retains and manages the nomination rights for these sites to the present day.

Current and ongoing work includes advocacy, policy, working with community partners and key agencies, as well as regional efforts, notably through the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA) and the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group. The Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-27 (the Strategy) builds on the work of the previous Knox Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-20. It reflects evidence of the housing needs in Knox.

In addition to this Strategy, Council has a Housing Strategy (Knox Housing Strategy, January 2015) which is currently under review. Part of this Review is to embed the priorities of the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2023–27 (as is demonstrated in the Appendix



under Action 1.6). The Housing Strategy provides direction for residential development and provides the basis for planning controls. Further, it identifies opportunities for new housing developments, including diversity of dwellings, sizes and other housing types.

The delivery of social and affordable housing is a responsibility shared across all three levels of government and requires the involvement of other stakeholders including community housing providers, community support services and private developers. Council is committed to working in partnership to improve affordable housing outcomes for those experiencing vulnerability in Knox.

1.2 Context Update – 2023-2025

Since the start of the Strategy, there have been many changes and reforms led by the Victorian State Government that have affected Council. In September 2023, the Victorian Government launched its Housing Statement, titled, 'The Decade Ahead 2024–2034', targeting the delivery of 800,000 new homes over the next 10 years. In this Statement, there is a focus on streamlining planning approvals, unlocking Crown land, and expanding support for social and affordable housing. As part of this, the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build commenced, which aims to deliver 12,000+ social and affordable homes, with 25% in regional areas and tailored support for priority cohorts.

In March 2025, there were amendments to the Consumer and Planning Legislation which aimed to streamline approvals, extend permit validity and increase tenant protections. There have also been several State-wide Planning Scheme amendments, aiming to facilitate housing delivery by creating largely notice-free pathways in activity centres and low-rise suburbs. The streamlining processes have meant that some approvals are now bypassing usual Council advertising and objection processes, which affects Council's ability to control new developments, including design, density or contributions to social and affordable housing where previously possible for appropriate development under the Knox Planning Scheme. This also means that advocacy remains extremely important in getting more social and affordable housing in Knox.

In March 2025, new rental laws were introduced to ban rental bidding and no-fault evictions, extend notice periods for rent increases or vacating notices from 60 days to 90 days, and eliminate unfair fees. The reforms also mandated minimum safety standards before advertising, introduced mandatory licencing and training for property professionals, and launched the new Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, to reduce pressure on Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for simpler issues. A 7.5% levy on short-stay accommodation, such as Airbnb was also announced, which is expected to generate around \$60–70 million a year for social and affordable housing. This has been in place since January 2025. While progress has been made at the legislative level, both purchasing and rental affordability continues to be an issue.

Victoria government funding over the last two years has also seen impacts on the housing and homelessness service sector, with almost \$197 million over four years to 'break the cycle of homelessness' and keep key programs going, including after-hours responses, Pride in Place, and Better Health & Housing. For the 2025-26 budget, \$61million was committed for homelessness



support, including rough-sleeping outreach and Aboriginal-led supports that are culturally appropriate. Whilst this is a positive contribution, housing and homelessness services in Knox are still strained, with demand increasing due to several factors. There are other supporting services such as mental health, family violence and food relief that also require more funding attention from the State Government. This demonstrates that the continual need to work toward the actions detailed in the Strategy.

1.3 Data Update – Summary of Need

The Strategy states that access to safe, secure and affordable housing was a key priority identified by the community when developing the Knox Council Plan 2021-25. This has again been identified in the new Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29, where community identified that advocating for affordable, social and community housing options so that people of all ages and stages can live comfortably in Knox was important.

This section details Knox specific data to demonstrate how issues around social and affordable housing have changed in the last two years. The most current public and Council data sources were reviewed, in consultation with Council’s Research and Geospatial Analytics, City Planning and Building, and Short-Term Support Teams. The data points have been compared with those detailed in the Strategy, under the sections titled ‘Summary of need for social and affordable housing in Knox’ (page 18) and ‘Monitoring and Evaluation’ (page 56-57).

1.3.1 Need for Housing

The 2021 Census data estimates that:

- 2,037 households, 3.5% of all households, were unable to access market priced rental housing; and
- 10.3% of households were in housing stress, meaning they were paying above 30% of their income on housing costs.

1.3.2 Housing Affordability

There are many external factors that influence housing affordability and place pressure on the Knox community. This includes housing market economics, a complex policy and regulatory environment, supply pressures, the continual cost of living crisis and ongoing structural inequality. The Social and Affordable Housing Strategy highlights partnerships as a critical part of work in this area. Council is committed to strengthening existing partnerships and continually developing new avenues to partner in this space.

Renting

The number of affordable dwellings available from the private market to rent for people in on very low- and low-incomes has decreased in the last two years:

- In 2022-23 there were 1539 affordable dwellings; and
- In 2023-24 there were 849 affordable dwellings.



In 2024, the proportion of all rental listings that were affordable to those on very low and low incomes were as follows:

- 0.3% for those on very low incomes; and
- 26.2% for those on low incomes.

Purchasing

The number of affordable dwellings available from the private market to buy for people in on very low and low incomes has increased in in the last two years:

- In 2022-23 there were 68 affordable dwellings; and
- In 2023-24 there were 91 affordable dwellings.

In 2024, the proportion of all dwellings available to purchase that were affordable to those on very low and low incomes were as follows:

- 0.4% for those on very low incomes; and
- 3.5% for those on low incomes.

Social Housing

Of all private dwellings in Knox, 2.3% are social housing. This number has remained the same since the Strategy was written taking into account fluctuations in both private and social housing dwellings. The number of social housing dwellings in Knox has in the last 3 years were:

- 1503 in 2021-22;
- 1522 in 2022-23; and
- 1491 in 2023-24.

Homes Victoria advised Council that the decrease was due to ongoing upgrades and maintenance. This has resulted in a net loss of social housing since the beginning of the Strategy.

1.3.3 Victorian Housing Register

The Victorian Housing Register (VHR) is where people register to access social housing in Victoria. Social housing is made up of public housing and community housing. The number of people on the VHR waiting for housing in Knox were:

- 3092 at the beginning of the Strategy; and
- 3276 as of March 2025.

Part of this number includes people waiting for Priority Access. Priority Access is for people who are experiencing homelessness and receiving support, are escaping or have escaped family violence, are a person with disability or significant support needs, or those who have other special housing needs. The number of people on the VHR waiting for Priority Access in Knox were:



- 2163 at the beginning of the Strategy; and
- 1790 at March 2025.

While the numbers are still alarmingly high, the decline in the number of people on the Victorian Housing Register is a positive trend.

1.3.4 Homelessness

The number of people in Knox who received specialist homelessness supports over the last 3 years were:

- 2597 in 2021-22 (as reported in the Strategy);
- 1946 in 2023; and
- 2113 in 2024.

Comparing Census data from 2016 and 2021 demonstrates that there has been an increase of people experiencing homelessness, with:

- 365 people experiencing homelessness in 2016; and
- 427 people experiencing homelessness in 2021.

Council's Short-Term Support Team recorded rough sleeping notifications are continuing to increase. The numbers of rough sleeping notifications that were triaged by the Short-Term Support Team were:

- 68 in 2022-2023;
- 129 in 2023-2024; and
- 145 in 2024-2025.

In addition, Council's Short-Term Support Team offered housing assistance to:

- 94 people in 2022-23;
- 335 people in 2023-24; and
- 370 people in 2024-25.

1.3.5 Further Considerations

In the Strategy, it is stated that there were 159 additional dwellings funded and in development in Knox in 2022. As this is led by the State Government and with several clauses in the Planning Scheme that exempt social housing to require permits, Council does not have access to this information. Council Officers are attempting to obtain an updated figure on this point by contacting Homes Victoria. Advocating for additional dwellings to be funded and developed in Knox is a crucial element of Knox's advocacy in this space.

In the Strategy, it is stated that an increase in supply of lower cost housing types or products



created through the market will be a high-level indicator to monitor. Council Officers explored this data point and was unable to collect data as affordable or low-cost dwellings are not disaggregated in housing type or housing sizes. Resources would be required explore setting up data collecting tools to obtain this data for the end of Strategy review.

1.4 Cohorts in need

When considering priority cohorts, it is important to note that identities are multifaceted and interconnected. Individuals can fit into just one, or many of these priority cohorts and the way that these factors of someone's identity intersect influences their experience. While anyone can experience homelessness, the cohorts detailed below are often overrepresented in the data of people experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Due to various systems at play, being a part of these cohorts can impact experiences of housing insecurity, homelessness and housing support services, creating unique challenges and barriers for individuals.

1.4.1 People experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough

In the 2016 Census, 365 people were experiencing homelessness. In 2021, that number increased to 427. This number is likely to have increased in the last 4 years due to the recent housing crisis and cost of living pressures. At a local level, this number has risen, with Council's Short-Term Support Team rough sleeping notifications continuing to increase significantly. In 2022-23, a total of 68 rough sleeping notifications were triaged by the Short-Term Support Team, compared to 129 in 2023-24 and 145 in 2024-25. In addition, housing assistance was offered to 94 people in 2022-23, 335 people in 2023-24 and 370 people in 2024-25.

Homelessness includes people who are sleeping rough (including in improvised homes, tents, streets or parks and cars), 'couch-surfing' or living in severely overcrowded dwellings. This does not include people who are marginally housed or people in rental or mortgage stress. For people who are experiencing homelessness or who have access to crisis accommodation, there is not enough social and affordable housing for them to transition into either in the Knox local government area or the wider Eastern Metropolitan area. This calls for continual advocacy to State and Federal Government to increase housing stock, while also creating innovative ways to fund and address these issues.

1.4.2 Women and children

Factors that contribute to housing insecurity for women include financial insecurity and inequality, the high cost of housing, relationship breakdown, disability and family violence. Importantly, family violence is the single biggest driver of homelessness for women, young people, and children in Victoria. Women from First Nations communities, culturally diverse backgrounds, those who experience a mental health condition or are aged over 55 years are at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness.

In 2016 in Knox, 82.2% of lone parent households were female and 17.8% were male. In 2021, this remained relatively unchanged with females being the majority of lone parent households (81% female, 19% male).



In 2016, women living alone in Knox over the age of 75 years made up 2.4% of households, as compared to 0.9% for men. In 2021, this rose to 2.8% and 1.1%, respectively. In Knox, the social conditions impacting housing affordability for women include:

- Lower full-time workforce participation rates at 44.2%, compared to 70.3% of men;
- More women earning a weekly income below the minimum wage at 47.1%, compared to 31.9% for men;
- In 2021, Knox had 1920 reported incidents of family violence, with 92% of incidents taking place in a residential location. A child or children were witnesses in 26% of these incidents. While we do not have more current data on these numbers, it was found that in 2023-24, 1131 people in Knox sought assistance with housing due to family violence issues in the home; and
- Of the 2113 people who received specialist homelessness services in Knox in 2024, 1295 were women and 818 were men.

Women over 55 years living alone are identified as a group at serious risk of homelessness across Australia. Superannuation at age 60 to 64 on average was less for women at \$289,179, compared to men at \$359,870. Strengthening the connection between housing support, family violence and gender inequality is a central component to increasing secure housing for women.

1.4.3 People with disability

In Knox, a quarter of individuals with disability are aged 20-59 years and another 20% are 85 years and older. In June 2022, 1 in 3 (33%) individuals and families receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) and with Disability Support Pension (DSP) as the primary income support payment were in rental stress. During the same period, 1 in 3 (36%) of social housing households had at least one person with disability.

At a local level, the Strategy identified that 17% of people who listed Knox Local Government Area as their first preference for location on the VHR need some form of modified housing. Considering this data, it is clear why housing for people with disability was identified as a critical gap during the stakeholder engagement process of the Strategy in 2022. Housing needs to be accessible, which includes single level dwellings, with step-less entry, wide halls and doorways, bathrooms that can accommodate mobility aids and/or a carer to assist. Two-bedroom homes are valued to accommodate a carer. A focus on diversifying housing options, including increasing smaller dwellings are important aspects to support people with disability access suitable housing options.

1.4.4 Seniors

Older people are strongly associated with a low-income in Knox. In 2016, residents aged 65 and over made up 15.4% of the Knox population but accounted for 30.9% of residents living in low-income households. Both numbers increased in the 2021 Census, with Knox residents aged 65 and over making up 17.8% of the population but accounting for 43.4% of low-income households. During this life stage, income and housing prospects are unlikely to improve. Older people in Knox are also over-represented in disability figures. The lack of smaller dwellings in Knox compounds the housing challenges facing older people who may find themselves living in larger, difficult to



maintain homes as their needs change.

Knox has a proud history of supporting housing for older people and continues to manage nomination rights for five seniors housing developments within Knox, as well as providing supports and social connections for residents in these estates. These developments are owned and managed by Department Families, Fairness and Housing, and there is a total of 168 units. As the Knox population continues to age, this is an extremely important area to ensure the residents of Knox can age in place, which can contribute to maintaining autonomy and independence, increased social connectedness and mental health, and other positive health impacts.

1.4.5 First Nations people

As stated in the Strategy, in 2022, there were 203 people who identified as First Nations on the Victorian Housing Register. With the First Nations population in Knox estimated at 1022, as of the 2021 Census, this represents almost 20% of this community. Knox's First Nations population has been growing, with a 38% increase in population from 2016 to 2021. Knox has the second largest First Nations population in the East of Melbourne, and young adults account for 23.1% of First Nations people in Knox. This data demonstrates that First Nations people continue to be a priority cohort. At the beginning of the Strategy, Knox had 0 Aboriginal housing properties and there are now 22 Aboriginal housing properties in Knox.

Whilst this is a positive increase, difficulties persist in providing Confirmation of Aboriginality. This can impede access Aboriginal housing, meaning that the figures from the VHR detailed above likely underestimate the level of housing need amongst the First Nations communities in Knox. Of the five Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) operating in Victoria, only two currently chose to provide Confirmation of Aboriginality, and neither are in the Knox area. Continual advocacy is needed on this issue. There are also opportunities to strengthen partnerships with ACCOs and First Nations health services to further understand what Council can do to support First Nations housing.

1.4.6 Single men (often with complex needs)

While there are many types of homelessness, people who are sleeping rough are more likely to be male, aged 35 or over, unemployed, living alone and experiencing drug or alcohol dependence, and/or chronic mental health conditions. Data demonstrates that homelessness has severe impacts on mental health, and people with lived experience of mental health conditions can be at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Data also shows that men are less likely to seek support for mental health concerns. Options for low income, single people experiencing homelessness are often limited to shared housing including rooming houses, which can be both unaffordable and unsafe for groups experiencing vulnerability.

Specialist housing support providers report that single men are directed towards private rooming houses. Stakeholders viewed rooming houses as a problematic form of accommodation, as they are often of poor quality and lack safety. They noted that many single men report they would 'rather sleep rough' than stay in a rooming house. There is a lack of suitable, supported accommodation for this group in Knox. Council has begun to explore this issue, as explained in the



progress comments in Appendix 1. Further consultation would need to be explored to gain a more in-depth understanding of this issue, and the potential solutions.



2. Overview of Progress

The below Table summarises the progress against the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy actions following the first two years of implementation:

Completed	*	3	Progress against this Action item has been completed. Reporting against this Action item will not be required for future reporting periods.
On Schedule	▶	23	Progress against an Action item is fully on track for this reporting period of July 2022 to June 2025. Reporting will continue for this Action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Not Started	■	1	This Action item has not been started in the identified time due to reasons described in the progress comments. Reporting will continue for this Action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Proposed to be closed	●	1	This Action has not been progressed as there have been external factors impeding development. It is proposed that this Action should be closed and not be required for future reporting periods.
TOTAL		28	

Details of the two Actions listed as not started or proposed to be closed as listed below:

- Action 1.11: "Continue to plan for and support diverse housing to meet changing community needs through a review of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023–27" has not yet started. This is in alignment with the Strategy's implementation timeline, which schedules this action to begin in Year 5.
- Action 3.8: "Work with the Municipal Association of Victoria to support the development of a Local Government Compact with Homes Victoria" has been proposed to be closed. This is due to the Local Government Compact being in draft form when the Strategy was written. However, the Compact never progressed further. The Municipal Association of Victoria continue to advocate for increased Social and Affordable housing and developed a position statement to this effect.

Overall, the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy actions are on track with 93% of actions either On Schedule or Completed. The sections below highlight some key achievements of the Strategy. Furthermore, some actions are subject to external funding being secured. A full



acquittal of each action within the Strategy is included as Appendix A.



3. Case Studies

3.1 Debra's Story - Supporting people experiencing homelessness

Action 2.3 - Implement the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping policy and procedure to provide direction for decision making and management processes in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in the Knox municipality.

Debra^{1*} is a 50-year-old woman who was sleeping in her car, which was parked on Council reserve land. She used the reserve's public facilities to shower and wash her clothes. At one point, Debra acted aggressively toward contracted Council cleaners, prompting a report of the incident and police involvement.

Following this, a Council Health and Safety Officer, along with a Council Open Spaces Officer, conducted a risk assessment of the area. During their visit, they encountered Debra and were able to speak with her about her situation. With her consent, they referred her to the Council's Short-Term Support (STS) team.

When the STS team connected with Debra, she disclosed that she had been living in her car for six years, had experienced prolonged family violence, and had lost custody of her children. Her mental health was declining, and she expressed an urgent need for help.

A rough sleeping notification was submitted, and a referral was made to The Salvation Army Outreach team, recommending that Debra be considered for the Homes First Program. Due to concerns about potential aggression, outreach was initially conducted by phone. During this contact, Debra gave her consent to be referred to Uniting, Knox's crisis housing entry point—and the only organisation authorised to refer individuals to the Homes First Program.

During this time, the Short-Term Support team remained in contact with Debra, whose mental health continued to decline. They explored alternative support options and kept her informed about the referral process.

Debra's referral was shortlisted for the Homes First Program, which selects participants through a Panel process. This Panel includes representatives from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Homes First, and Crisis Entry Point providers. With Debra's consent, the Short-Term Support team requested to participate in the panel to advocate on her behalf.

The Team attended the Panel meeting and strongly advocated for Debra to be accepted into the program. She was successfully selected—one of very limited spots in the Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities.

¹ *Name has been changed for anonymity



Through the Homes First Program, Debra will receive priority access to housing and three years of intensive, wraparound case management.

3.2 Boral Quarry Development – Navigating Planning Reforms

Action 1.2 - Using the principles outlined in Appendix 1 of this Strategy, negotiate with developers for a voluntary 5% contribution of social housing in private land developments including strategic investigation sites where rezoning is required.

In 2020, the Boral site located at 191 George Street, Wantirna South, was initially lodged directly with Council for assessment. At the time, the Department of Planning did not have a fast-track process in place, meaning the proposal followed the standard Council-led approach. The Boral site is a rare 60-hectare infill development opportunity, formerly a quarry, and still half active. Given its scale and location, it was identified as a priority project, with Council expecting to drive key commercial outcomes, including a 5% social and affordable housing contribution as a condition of rezoning.

To formalise the social and affordable housing component, a Section 173 Agreement was prepared and registered on the land title prior to the rezoning application being lodged. An Affordable Housing Framework was also prepared by the developer's consultant and submitted to Council. Negotiations however broke down before the Section 173 Agreement could be signed. Several sticking points emerged, including a key site access point going against Council's biodiversity protections. As a result, the developer decided to bypass Council and seek rezoning directly from the Minister for Planning.

The Department of Transport and Planning's Development Facilitation Unit (DFU) took over the assessment on behalf of the Minister. This pathway, more accessible under recent planning reforms, is increasingly used by developers for major projects. The DFU process retained an affordable housing condition and increased the contribution from 5% to 10%. However, during this process, the DFU's proposed drafting removed the explicit social housing requirement, which is concerning, as social housing ensures affordability regardless of market fluctuations, unlike affordable housing.

This shift ended direct negotiations with Council, reducing the municipality's control over the percentage and type of affordable housing provided, whether the contribution would be delivered as dwellings or as a financial payment, how and where any financial contribution would ultimately be spent. Council is advocating for any financial contribution from this project to be reinvested in Knox, rather than allocated elsewhere by Homes Victoria. Council has provided formal comments on the DFU's proposed conditions, but it remains unclear whether these changes will be adopted in the final approval. Advice was issued in late August 2025 by the Minister for Planning confirming that the planning scheme amendment and development proposal had been referred a Priority Projects Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) for a hearing to occur in October to consider various issues outlined by Council. One of the issues to be considered by the SAC is the affordable housing contribution attached to the proposal and how it will be applied. A report is not expected



to be issued by the SAC until later this year (2025), any determination by the Minister for Planning will be issued thereafter.

This case study reflects the complexity of the current planning and housing environment, where ministerial intervention and accelerated pathways can streamline delivery but reduce local government's influence. It also demonstrates how long these processes can take. Further, Homes Victoria's increasing role in delivering housing through planning changes has also shifted responsibility away from Councils, who now often act in an advisory capacity only.

3.3 Joe's Story - Supporting service system navigation and access to housing

Action 2.6 - Continue to support older persons (over 55 years) who are at risk of homelessness by providing the housing support service and guiding the application of Council's nomination rights over designated older persons sites of public housing within the Knox municipality.

Joe^{2*} is a 57-year-old man who presented to Councils' Housing Support Officer in desperate need of appropriate accommodation. Joe had a longstanding history of experiencing homelessness at various points in his life.

At the time of presentation, Joe was living in a private rental that was both unaffordable and unsuitable. The property had no connection to electricity or gas, and there were ongoing issues with the landlord. Ultimately, the property was deemed uninhabitable under the minimum standards required for a tenancy.

Due to the landlord's conduct, Joe was involved in multiple hearings at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). He was connected with legal support through Justice Connect, which provided assistance throughout the legal process.

Joe's current and previous housing instability contributed to significant trauma, including Complex PTSD, depression, and anxiety. These mental health challenges often fluctuated and made it difficult for him to consistently engage with support services.

In response, the Housing Support Officer took several steps to assist Joe:

- Submitted a Public Housing Application through the Victorian Housing Register;
- Liaised with Joe's legal representatives regarding the VCAT hearings;
- Connected Joe with Uniting for housing support, Knox Infolink for material aid and meals, and mental health services; and
- Worked to find affordable and appropriate long-term housing.

² *Name has been changed for anonymity



As a result of these efforts:

- Joe's Public Housing Application was approved by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing;
- Justice Connect provided ongoing legal representation, enabling a collaborative approach to resolving tenancy issues;
- Joe was successfully linked with Uniting for further housing support and with Knox Infolink, which assisted with material aid, meals, and other needs;
- He re-engaged with his GP and psychologist to address his mental health concerns; and
- The Housing Support Officer was able to nominate Joe for a public housing vacancy through Knox City Council's nomination process, which led to Joe accepting a long-term, affordable public housing offer.

3.4 Community Housing Developments in Knox Part 1 – Community Housing Limited

Action 3.3 - Further consult with registered community housing providers to determine their preferred delivery and partnership models for working with Council.

The social housing development close to the Knox City Council Civic Centre is located at Wantirna South. This project is delivered by Community Housing Limited and is one of the developments of the Homes Victoria Social Housing Growth Fund. The development includes 118 dwellings, comprising 66 one-bedroom apartments and 52 two-bedroom apartments.

The development was delivered under the Big Build – Affordable Housing Speed Round. All dwellings are social housing, with 75% of allocations drawn from the Victorian Housing Register's Priority Access Waitlist. As Knox's Housing Support Officer has access to the VHR list for Knox residents over 55 for the nomination rights to the five Department of Families Fairness and Housing Properties, they engaged with 44 people during this time. Twenty-one of these people secured housing in the CHL build, 18 applicants were unsuccessful, 2 people were housed elsewhere and 3 declined the offer.

Community engagement for the site began six months before the official opening of the development. Community Housing Limited approached various teams from Council to be a part of an Activation Group. Other stakeholders such as local support organisations and Neighbourhood Houses were also invited to be a part of this group. The Activation Group held monthly meetings in the first six months to plan engagement activities, which would help to connect new residents with local services and social activities. Some of the Council teams that were involved included Libraries, Community Access and Support, Community Strengthening and Early Years.

The Activation Group developed the relationship between Community Housing Limited and Council, with some of the activities and initiatives that took place being:

- A welcome BBQ with Council officers in attendance from the teams listed above. Resources provided on topics such as First Nations support, maternal and child health services, library

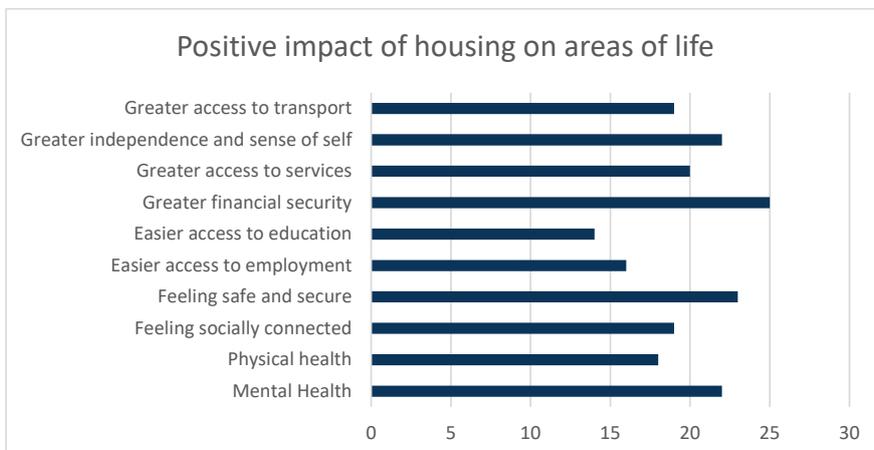


- services, family violence support, mental health support, and emergency and food relief.
- Council’s Multicultural Partnerships Officer connected with CHL to provide resources for English language classes and various cultural groups. This has helped to connect residents from multicultural backgrounds with community groups and support.
- Early Years teams attending the residents’ playgroups, allowing for check ins, resource sharing and referrals to be made when required.
- As a part of the residents’ Coffee Club, Council staff delivered a free ‘pop up op shop’. This was an upcycling initiative that was another opportunity for Council to support residents with clothing as well as resources and engagement with staff.
- Community Housing Limited reached out to Council for information regarding grant opportunities. Council was able to provide information about Council grants as well as external grants that may have been appropriate. Unfortunately, CHL could not apply for the Council grant due to eligibility criteria of the project, however the partnership built between CHL and Council continues.

3.5 Community Housing Developments in Knox Part 2–Impact of Housing

Action 2.5 - Actively support and advocate for initiatives that engage with residents living in public and social housing to build community connections and resilience to prevent homelessness through the provision of appropriate support services.

As a part of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy Mid-Term Review, Council Officers engaged with Community Housing Limited and residents of the community housing apartments to hear about their experiences. Council Officers attended the weekly Coffee Club mentioned in the case study above to explain two engagement activities aimed at collecting stories from residents. Officers returned the following week to check in with residents and collect the activities. One of the activities was a poster where residents were encouraged to place a sticker next to areas of their life that had been positively impacted since moving in. There was no limit to the number of stickers they could put up. A total of 198 stickers were placed on the poster, with the distribution detailed in the graph below:





Financial security scored the highest number of stickers, with mental health, feeling safe and secure and greater sense of independence and sense of self also rating highly. This activity demonstrated the many other areas that housing has an impact on. Once safe and secure housing is accessed, other challenges in people's lives can be addressed.

The other activity involved a "Letter Box" where people could write in their own words anything about their experiences, including what living in their homes meant to them, what ideas they had to make their experience better, or any challenges that they faced. One person shared their story:

"I applied for public housing in 2006 for my son and myself. My son was 2 years old. We have been on the waitlist for 19 years! As my son doesn't want to live so far away from uni and public transport I had to downgrade to a one-bedroom apartment even though my son struggles with mental health issues and is unsupported living with his father. I do not understand why we were on the waitlist for 19 years without any communication from VHR"

This story demonstrates the complex challenges people are facing when interacting with systems that are under resourced, creating barriers for people accessing safe and secure housing. It highlights Council's role in drawing on lived experience in our advocacy work, to support the Knox community.

Some of the other points that residents shared included:

- "All housing estates need community gathering space, inside and out, community room for activities, staff to connect people";
- "Community spaces – we could have classes/book the room for birthday parties/host a movie night. A communal space that anyone can access whenever/meet up for a coffee or have a homework club";
- "More community engagement - staff and mentors to connect and give residents a voice";
- "Build more environmentally – solar panels, batteries, water recycling for the garden"; and
- "Car space for everyone! There is no parking here/to keep car overnight. There's no spot for drop"

Themes around community spaces, connection to the physical environment and accessibility have been raised in these points above. These engagement activities demonstrate the mix of positive impacts and ongoing challenges that people living in community housing face.



4. Successes and Opportunities

The review of the Strategy has identified a range of successes arising during the first two years of implementation, as well as opportunities to further consolidate work for the remainder of the implementation period (2025-27).

Successes

- The Strategy's cross-Council actions have established a coordinated, whole-of-Council approach to addressing social and affordable housing.
- Partnerships with other local Councils through the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance and the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group have enabled ongoing collaborative work on joint advocacy and awareness raising campaigns.
- The mid-term review confirms progress across all strategic focus areas, while also acknowledging external challenges and the long-term nature of this work.
- Since adoption, new systems have been embedded to streamline processes and keep social and affordable housing as an organisational priority.
- The introduction of a cross-Council reporting system (Pulse) has enhanced monitoring and accountability, providing a central platform for annual progress reporting.
- This structured reporting supports ongoing advocacy by strengthening Council's evidence base and highlighting emerging opportunities.
- Several significant outcomes have already been delivered, including those showcased in the case studies above.

Opportunities

Staff identified the following opportunities for consideration in the remaining two-year implementation period for the Strategy:

- Align this Strategy with the new Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29, ensuring its actions are prioritised in annual action plans, under the Theme Planning our future city;
- Embed an intersectional approach across all actions, beginning with a review of the Equity Impact Assessment conducted as part of this mid-term review and adding equity as a standing agenda the social and affordable housing implementation group; and
- Recognise that some actions rely on external funding and place a stronger emphasis on identifying and securing these resources to enable delivery over the remainder of the Strategy.



5. Appendix A: Action Progress Reports July 2023 – June 2025

Key:

Symbol	Meaning
On schedule ▶	Progress against this action item is fully on track for this reporting period of July 2023 to June 2025. Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Completed *	Progress against this action item has been completed. Reporting against this action item will not be required for future reporting periods.
Behind Schedule ◆	Progress against this action item has partially met the scheduled timeline for this reporting period. Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods.
Not Started ■	This action item has not been started in the identified time due to reasons described in the progress comments. Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
Proposed To Be Closed ●	This action item has not been progressed as there have been external factors impeding development. It is proposed that this action item should be closed and not be required for future reporting periods.



Strategic Focus 1: Planning & Regulation

This strategic focus outlines how Council will guide Knox’s housing and infrastructure to meet the changing needs of our community, particularly our most vulnerable residents.

Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
1.1 Adopt the definitions of social and affordable housing and minimum supply of social housing targets outlined in this Strategy.	Year 1-3 Revised definitions to be updated as relevant documents are reviewed	Plan	Community Strengthening City Futures	Completed *	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action is to embed definitions in the review of relevant policy and strategy documents such as the Knox Housing Strategy, Knox Planning Scheme and the Sale of Council Land and Buildings Policy. The work to update these strategies and policies was not yet commenced in the first year.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>All teams involved in work regarding social and affordable housing have adopted and continue to use the definitions of social and affordable housing and minimum supply of social housing targets outlined in this Strategy. The review of the Knox Housing Strategy is currently underway, and the embedded definitions will continue to be utilised.</p>	<p>Progress against this action item has been completed.</p> <p>Reporting against this action item will not be required for future reporting periods.</p>
1.2 Using the principles outlined in Appendix 1 of this	Year 1-5 As planning	Regulate	City Futures	On schedule	2023 – 2024	Reporting will continue



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
Strategy, negotiate with developers for a voluntary 5% contribution of social housing in private land developments including strategic investigation sites where rezoning is required.	amendments arise			▶	<p>Officers have negotiated social housing contributions for the strategic investigation site in Wantirna South (known as the Boral Quarry redevelopment site) in line with the recommendations from the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy (5% contribution). A draft Section 173 Agreement has been drafted to deliver social housing as part of future development which was presented to Knox Council for endorsement in Q3.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Eight social and affordable housing lots were secured in the Norvel Quarry redevelopment in Ferntree Gully as part of a Section 173 Agreement for the site. The amendment and planning permit was adopted by Council on 26 August 2024. Work on Boral Quarry and Norvel Quarry continued this year.</p>	for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
1.3 Consider opportunities as part of planning	Year 1-5 As suitable planning	Plan Regulate	City Planning and Building	On schedule	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>Bankside development, Rowville – a financial contribution towards social housing</p>	Reporting will continue



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
<p>applications with a large dwelling yield for applicants to contribute to social and/ or affordable housing outcomes where an additional uplift is being sought and a trade-off could be supported.</p>	<p>applications are considered</p>		<p>City Futures</p>	<p>▶</p>	<p>provision was paid to Council as part of the requirements of the Development Plan Overlay which effects the site.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Old Jenkins Orchard site, Wantirna South - Officers continue to negotiate the provision of social housing through a Section 173 Agreement.</p> <p>Bankside development – ongoing negotiations for the provision of a financial contribution towards social housing in the next stage of development of the site.</p> <p>Officers will encourage opportunities for social and affordable housing for planning applications with a large dwelling yield where appropriate and as required by the Knox Planning Scheme. Due to recent State Government led Planning Reform changes, it is unlikely that Council will be the responsible authority for major residential projects that trigger the requirements for the provision of affordable and social housing.</p>	<p>for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>
<p>1.4 Establish a</p>	<p>Year 2-3</p>	<p>Regulate</p>	<p>Community</p>	<p>On</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p>	<p>Reporting</p>



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
<p>transparent procedure for holding and reinvesting financial contributions received through developer negotiations, to maximise social and/or affordable housing outcomes.</p>			<p>Strengthening City Futures</p>	<p>schedule ▶</p>	<p>The reserve fund was established prior to the end of the 2022-23 financial year. In 2023-24, the procedure for reinvesting financial contributions was still to be developed.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Collaboration has taken place with the relevant teams in this area. As there is nothing under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 that mandates this action. This means that the procedure for holding and reinvesting financial contributions through developer negotiations is done through voluntary Section 173 Agreements, on a site-by-site basis. Unless there is a review of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, undertaking Section 173s is the way this action is achieved. It is Council’s preference that developers include social and affordable housing as a part of their developments, rather than providing financial contributions. This ensures that as new dwellings are built, and Knox’s social and affordable housing stock increases simultaneously.</p>	<p>will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
1.5 Incorporate the findings of this Strategy in the review of the Knox Housing Strategy 2015.	Year 2-5	Regulate Plan	City Futures	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action was not set to start until Year 2, therefore there are no progress comments for Year 1.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>There were delays with the release of the State Government’s new Plan for Victoria Strategic Plan. This delayed Council’s work on this action as targets are set by Plan for Victoria. The Victorian Strategic Plan was released on 28 February 2025. Work has now begun on reviewing the Knox Housing Strategy 2015 which will incorporate new Knox targets and further planning reforms.</p>	<p>This action item has not been started in the identified time due to reasons described in the progress comments.</p> <p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>
1.6 As part of the review of the Knox Housing Strategy, undertake a detailed	Year 2-5	Research	City Futures City Planning and Building	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>City Strategy reviewed case studies of social and affordable housing policy to understand what other Australian and international</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this</p>



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
audit of local planning controls and provisions to identify unintended barriers to facilitating the supply of affordable housing types.					<p>Councils were doing in this area.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>The delays of the release of the State Government’s new Plan for Victoria Strategic Plan delayed the review of the Knox Housing Strategy. There are limitations to this action due to the Victorian system where affordable housing contributions as a part of developments are not mandated.</p>	action item for future reporting periods as designated.
1.7 Promote diverse housing options (including social and affordable housing) as an appropriate outcome of structure plans, Strategic Investigation Sites and other new residential developments.	<p>Year 1-5</p> <p>To be actioned as opportunities arise.</p>	Plan	City Futures	<p>On schedule</p> <p>►</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>Officers negotiated social housing contributions for the strategic investigation site in Wantirna South (known as the Boral Quarry redevelopment site) in line with the recommendations from the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy (5% contribution). A draft Section 173 Agreement was drafted to deliver social housing as part of future development which was presented to Knox Council for endorsement in Q3.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Eight affordable housing lots were secured as part of the s173 Agreement for the Norvel</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
					Quarry redevelopment. The amendment and planning permit was adopted by Council on 26 August 2024. In addition, the draft Bayswater Renewal Strategy incorporates strategies and actions to promote and facilitate diverse housing options including social and affordable housing in the Bayswater Activity Centre.	
1.8 Undertake an audit of surplus and under-utilised Council and other publicly owned land within or in close proximity to designated Activity Centres with a view to identifying a short-list of potential sites for social and affordable housing partnerships.	Year 1-2	Regulate	Community Strengthening City Futures Property Services	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action was superseded by the development of a Strategic Property Prioritisation Framework.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>The Strategic Property Prioritisation Framework was endorsed by Council on the 26 August 2024. The Framework considers the objectives of identifying surplus and under-utilised land, including proximity to Activity centres, each time a property is assessed through it. However, it is worth noting that the Framework is not applied to the entire asset portfolio in one sweep.</p> <p>Instead, the Framework enables a more targeted and strategic approach, allowing</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
					<p>Council to assess properties as they come up for review, in alignment with Council’s broader priorities and operational capacity. This ensures that opportunities for social and affordable housing are considered in a way that is both responsive and sustainable.</p> <p>An audit as described under this action requires resources and funding that Council has been limited in over the last two years. Officers will explore opportunities for resourcing as they arise.</p>	
<p>1.9 In consultation with the community housing sector develop a coordinated and best practice approach to the development of a healthy and regulated rooming house sector.</p>	Year 2-3	Regulate	<p>Community Strengthening</p> <p>Community Access & Support</p> <p>City Safety & Health</p>	<p>On schedule</p> <p>▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action was not set to start until Year 2, therefore there are no progress comments for Year 1.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Council requires rooming houses to register annually and pay a registration fee. Inspections conducted by Council's Environmental Health Team are generally conducted once a year, focusing on issues like overcrowding, compliance with room occupancy limits, the condition of common areas, cleanliness, availability of hot water,</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
					and the presence of exhaust fans. Council is having ongoing consultations with the community housing sector, Community Access & Support and City Safety & Health to scope and assess the current approach and opportunities for improvement.	
1.10 Explore how the policy on the disposal of Council land considers social and affordable housing outcomes for sites suitable for residential development.	Year 1-2	Plan	Procurement & Property Community Strengthening	Completed *	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>In this year, planning for the development and implementation of the Strategic Property Prioritisation Framework was commenced.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Council endorsed the Strategic Property Prioritisation Framework on 26 August 2024, which guides officers in considering whether a site is suitable for divestment. This Framework ensures that Council maximises the value and utility of its land assets, while considering the needs of the community, financial feasibility and long-term outcomes. It includes careful examination of whether a site is redundant to community needs. Where appropriate, this includes consideration of whether social or</p>	<p>Progress against this action item has been completed.</p> <p>Reporting against this action item will not be required for future reporting periods.</p>



Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
					affordable housing is appropriate at this site.	
1.11 Continue to plan for and support diverse housing to meet changing community needs through a review of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-27.	Year 5	Research	Community Strengthening	Not Started ■	2023 – 2024 This action is not set to start until Year 5, therefore there are no progress comments for Year 1 or 2.	This action item has not been started in the identified time due to reasons described in the progress comments. Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



Strategic Focus 2: Advocacy & Targeted Support

This strategic focus determines how Council will play a key role in research, advocacy and policy issues that relate to improving access to social and affordable housing for our most vulnerable residents. It also outlines how Council will support specific groups in the community.

Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
2.1 Strongly advocate to State and Federal Government for an increase in social and affordable housing resources based on evidence, and support local agencies and networks and agencies in their advocacy to government.	Year 1-5 As opportunities arise, including State and Federal government elections	Research Advocate	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>Council Officers meet with Homes Victoria representatives on a bi-monthly basis to share information regarding potential social housing projects in Knox Officers prepared a submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Strategy consultation. The submission highlighted Council's advocacy asks of Federal Government as outlined in the Knox Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>In September 2024, the Victorian Government issued a Housing Statement Progress Update which officers reviewed and considered impacts and opportunities for Knox.</p> <p>In 2025, Council continued to work with the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA) to scope additional advocacy opportunities. Council also submitted to the Victorian</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



					<p>Government for their Plan for Victoria. The Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group, which Knox is a part of, submitted a response to Infrastructure Victoria on their Draft 30 Year Strategy.</p> <p>Council Officers have developed a layer on the internal mapping platform to identify social housing in Knox. This dataset will enable current stock to be accounted for and identify gaps, which can inform advocacy to State and Federal Government that more social housing stock is needed in Knox.</p>	
<p>2.2 Undertake community campaigns to raise awareness and support for people who experience homelessness or need social housing in Knox including opportunities for community based action (e.g. Homes for Homes initiative)</p>	<p>Year 1-5 Annual campaign or awareness message</p>	<p>Educate Advocate</p>	<p>Community Strengthening Community Access & Support</p>	<p>On schedule ▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>As the lead organisation for the Preventing Homeless in Older Women research project, Knox hosted a series of events to raise awareness of the drivers of homelessness for women over 55. These events included "Making It Home" (March 2023), hosted by public commentator Jane Caro and including a screening of the documentary "Under Cover". The event featured a panel discussion with the film maker, lead researcher and a woman with lived experience of homelessness. Two online webinars were then hosted, the first during Homelessness Week in August 2023 to share the phase one research findings. A second webinar in December 2023 then shared the</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



				<p>phase two research findings, which included an in-depth analysis at some of the proposed solutions identified in phase one.</p> <p>A Knox News story was also released during Homelessness Week 2023, sharing the story of a Boronia resident who experienced homelessness for over 16 years following a marriage breakdown, before securing a two-bedroom social housing unit. The article raised awareness that homelessness may impact anyone in our community and promoted local services such as Knox Infolink and Council's own Short Term Support team.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Knox Council staff were involved in the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group working group for Homelessness Week in 2024 and 2025.</p> <p>The webinar in 2024 focused on responding to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, preventing homelessness among older women research project - phase 2 and affordable, alternative and appropriate housing for people over 55.</p> <p>The webinar in 2025 focused on services that support people experiencing homelessness that are beyond the basic needs, such as</p>	
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					Maroondah Winter Shelter, Manningham Shower Program, Ready Set, Orange Sky and Pets of the Homeless.	
2.3 Implement the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Policy and Procedure to provide direction for decision making and management processes in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in the Knox municipality.	Year 1-2 Policy due for review in Year 2	Provide	Community Access & Support	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>A Working Group was established and provided feedback to further strengthen the Policy. Updated Procedures have been developed and awaiting approval after election period. Notifications are received and managed by Housing and Short-Term Support Officer and a collaborative approach across Council is being undertaken to address individual notifications of people sleeping rough. The Working Group will continue to meet to review current procedures and workflows to ensure a consistent approach.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>The Rough Sleeping Policy is currently scheduled for review, with minor amendments proposed. In contrast, the associated Rough Sleeping Procedure has undergone substantial revision. These changes aim to more clearly articulate the process for responding to individuals sleeping rough and to define the roles and responsibilities of relevant Council departments involved when responding to reports for people sleeping rough.</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



					The updated Policy and Procedure are scheduled to be presented to Council in September 2025 for endorsement.	
2.4 Seek funding to allow Council to undertake social housing projects, and to continue to understand the housing needs for the Knox municipality.	Year 1-5 Initiate funding applications as opportunities arise.	Research	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	2023 – 2024 Funding opportunities have not been available to local government during Year 1 or 2.	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
2.5 Actively support and advocate for initiatives that engage with residents living in public and social housing to build community connections and resilience to prevent homelessness through the provision of appropriate support services.	Year 1-2	Provide Advocate	Community Access & Support	On schedule ▶	2023 – 2024 The dedicated role titled Community Connections Recovery Officer conducted many initiatives supporting residents of the 5 older people’s public housing estates in Knox. Initiatives included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onsite digital literacy classes, • English speaking classes, • Supported the delivery of safety advice by arranging for Victoria Police members to attend the estates and discuss safety concerns, • The development of craft group which continues to be self-managed with a volunteer from a community house, and 	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community garden project that has partnered with a community house to implement a healthy eating program using produce from the garden. <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>The funding for the role of Community Connections Recovery Officer was completed in November 2024, and as a result there are lasting initiatives across the estates that continue. The community garden continues to be maintained by residents with an ongoing program being run by a community house to support residents to cook healthy food using the garden produce. There is a digital literacy program run by Your Library. Recent partnership with Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to engage with the residents across 3 of the estates identified initiatives to utilise onsite community rooms, facilitating social interaction. These sessions were held in May 2025. The Health and Active Ageing team also regularly promote community events with the residents, encouraging participation in social activities.</p>	
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<p>2.6 Continue to support older persons (over 55 years) who are at risk of homelessness by providing the housing support service and guiding the application of Council’s nomination rights over designated older persons sites of public housing within the Knox municipality.</p>	<p>Year 1-5</p>	<p>Provide Advocate</p>	<p>Community Access & Support</p>	<p>On schedule ▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024 During this period 13 people were housed across the five estates. 62 Interviews were conducted for new clients and placed on the waiting list. An additional 208 people were supported with housing issues and concerns.</p> <p>2024 – 2025 During this period 16 people were housed across the five estates. 70 Interviews were conducted for new clients and placed on the waiting list. An additional 261 people were supported with housing issues and concerns.</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>
<p>2.7 Discuss issues associated with affordable housing in the community engagement process for structure plans and other place based strategic plans for Activity Centres and other sites.</p>	<p>Year 1-5 To be included as plans are developed or reviewed</p>	<p>Educate</p>	<p>City Futures</p>	<p>On schedule ▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024 Officers discussed affordable housing issues and opportunities as part of the community and stakeholder engagement processes for the Boronia and Bayswater activity centre structure plans.</p> <p>2024 – 2025 Boronia and Bayswater are the main place-based strategies. Focus on Action 2.7 has been placed in these two strategies. The structure</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



					plans for both Boronia and Bayswater include actions relating to affordable housing.	
2.8 Advocate for changes to the formal Confirmation of Aboriginality requirement for access to the Aboriginal Housing Victoria waiting list.	Year 1-3	Advocate Partner	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the East are exploring pathways to explore Confirmation of Aboriginality undertaken partnership with each other. It is a significant issue for First Nations community because the funding eligibility to represent people for legal and housing services still requires confirmation of Aboriginality by the State Government, and this requires confirmation from an Aboriginal organisation on letterhead. It is a service gap for community.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Council has continued to advocate for a simpler process for this requirement. For example, instead of the Confirmation of Aboriginality requirement, for legal and housing organisations to accept a statutory declaration to prove identity.</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
2.9 Promote Council grant opportunities to social housing providers to support programs and events	Year 2-5	Fund	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action was not set to start until Year 2, therefore there are no progress comments for Year 1.</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item



<p>that benefit Knox social housing residents.</p>				<p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Council is continuing to develop relationships with local housing providers and services. This has occurred with Community Housing Limited, in which Council staff attended an activation group for the purpose of developing connections between the project and services. The Community Development Manager from Community Housing Limited reached out to the activation group to ask for grant information. They intended to upgrade an old shed to turn it into a community space. The Short-Term Support Team Leader got in touch with Community Partnerships Team Leader, who passed on information about Council Grants and other grants that would be appropriate. Work is underway for developing consistent means of reaching and working with housing and housing service providers.</p>	<p>for future reporting periods as designated.</p>
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Strategic Focus 3: Collaboration & Partnerships

This strategic focus supports Council’s commitment to work in a collaborative and coordinated way to create and improve the physical, social, natural, cultural and economic environments that promote health and wellbeing

Action	Year/s	Council Role	Responsible Department	Status	Summary Y1-2	Future
3.1 Continue to support and facilitate the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA).	Year 1-5 In line with the EAHA Strategic Plan and annual workplans.	Partner Advocate	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	2023 – 2024 The EAHA Strategic Communications and Advocacy position is auspiced through Knox. Ongoing support for the Alliance includes participating in Homelessness Week activities, attendance at Steering and Executive Committees, and planning for capacity building for new Councillors. 2024 – 2025 EAHA continues to meet regularly and discuss the challenges of social and affordable housing through the Steering and Executive Committees, participating in the development and running of Homelessness Week Webinars and planning for capacity building for new Councillors.	Progress against this action item has been completed. Reporting against this action item will not be required for future reporting periods.
3.2 Continue to contribute to and participate in the Regional Local	Year 1-2	Partner	Community Strengthening	Completed *	2023 – 2024 Officers have been part of the Communications Working Group for the	Progress against this action item has been



<p>Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group.</p>					<p>Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group, working with Common Cause to develop a Social Housing Guide, to provide consistent and clear messaging for the community on the need for more local social housing.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Officers continued to participate in the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group to focus on social and affordable housing. Collaborative work has been done on the webinar event for Homelessness Week in 2024 and 2025, as well as sharing inter Council updates on work in this space to create partnerships and capacity build.</p>	<p>completed.</p> <p>Reporting against this action item will not be required for future reporting periods.</p>
<p>3.3 Further consult with registered community housing providers to determine their preferred delivery and partnership models for working with Council.</p>	<p>Year 2-3</p>	<p>Research</p>	<p>Community Strengthening</p>	<p>On schedule ▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>This action was not set to start until Year 2, therefore there are no progress comments for Year 1.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Council has been consulting with the community housing sector to understand their preferred approaches to delivery and partnership. Early feedback indicates that the sector values Council’s involvement in</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



					areas such as activation groups, community engagement activities, and information sharing.	
3.4 Consult with State Government on selective redevelopment of existing concentrations of public housing (for which Council manages nomination rights) that are older or poorly maintained to increase the diversity and sustainability of stock.	Year 1-5 As initiated by State Government	Research Advocate.	Community Access & Support Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>Two meetings were held with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing team at Ringwood to discuss maintenance issues across the 5 older people’s public housing estates, with many issues addressed over the past year. These meetings are held quarterly with Community Access and Support representation. The Housing Support Officer visited each estate and collated list of maintenance issues which was provided to the housing team for follow up. Advocacy continued to the Housing team on behalf of residents of the housing estates.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>Quarterly meetings were held with the local Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, housing team and there is continued advocacy for maintenance of the five older people’s housing estates. Residents have been provided with resources to guide them on how to report</p>	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



					issues of concern directly to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.	
3.5 Convene a social and affordable housing implementation group comprising key Council officers to monitor the implementation of the strategy and identify opportunities for advocacy and/or housing projects.	Year 1-5 To meet a minimum of twice per year	Provide	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	2023 – 2024 Meetings were arranged for key staff across Council to meet to identify opportunities for housing advocacy and projects. 2024 – 2025 The Social Policy and Advocacy Officer set up regular quarterly meeting (initially, then potentially half-yearly) with the Responsible Officers listed in this plan. This will work to implement and monitor the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.
3.6 Undertake a transparent and competitive expression of interest process with Community Housing Providers when appropriate Council owned sites are identified for social housing development.	Year 1-5 Actioned as opportunities arise.	Provide	Community Strengthening	On schedule ▶	2023 – 2024 Council undertook an Expression Of Interest process for Community Housing Providers for a parcel of land in Bayswater in 2023, the chosen provider worked with Council to develop plans for the site that would have included 19 dwellings, however after a period of consultation, Council determined that they did not want to proceed with the sale of the land to a community housing provider. 2024 – 2025	Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.



					Officers continued to investigate further opportunities such as the example from the previous year as they arise.	
<p>3.7 Conduct regular meetings with Homes Victoria to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Council is informed of opportunities to increase social and affordable housing in Knox. • Provide timely advocacy of the social and affordable housing needs of Knox residents. 	<p>Year 1-5</p> <p>Seek a minimum 2 meetings per year</p>	<p>Advocate</p>	<p>Community Strengthening</p>	<p>On schedule</p> <p>▶</p>	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>In Year 1 of this strategy, there were 3 meetings with Homes Victoria and Council representatives including Community Strengthening, Community Access & Support, Planning & Building Services, and City Futures. Meetings have focused on project updates, with building of the social housing at 500 Burwood Hwy commencing and anticipated to conclude before the end of 2024. Meetings have also provided an opportunity to understand changes within the structure and priorities of Homes Victoria following the State Government Housing Statement released in September 2023.</p> <p>2024 – 2025</p> <p>In Year 2 of this Strategy, 3 meetings were conducted with Homes Victoria and Council representatives including Community Strengthening, Community Access & Support, Planning & Building Services, and City Futures. Meetings have focused on project updates.</p>	<p>Reporting will continue for this action item for future reporting periods as designated.</p>



<p>3.8 Work with the Municipal Association of Victoria to support the development of a Local Government compact with Homes Victoria.</p>	<p>Year 1</p>	<p>Advocate</p>	<p>Community Strengthening</p>	<p>Proposed To Be Closed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<p>2023 – 2024</p> <p>The Local Government Compact was in draft form when this Strategy was written, however it never progressed further. Municipal Association of Victoria continue to advocate for increased Social and Affordable housing and developed a position statement to this effect.</p>	<p>This Action has not been progressed as there have been external factors impeding development.</p> <p>It is proposed that this Action should be closed and not be required for future reporting periods.</p>
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4.3 Event Option for Australia Day 2026

Final Report Destination:	Mid-Month
Paper Type:	For Decision
Author:	Manager Active and Creative Communities, Nicole Columbine
Manager:	Manager Active and Creative Communities, Nicole Columbine
Director:	Director Connected Communities, Judy Chalkley

SUMMARY

This report responds to Councillors' request to develop a proposal for an event to acknowledge and celebrate Australia Day in 2026.

The report outlines a small-scale event for Tim Neville Arboretum and is now presented to Council for a decision on whether to proceed with an event, and to allocate a budget for delivery of the event.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to:

1. Support a small-scale event "Knox Picnic in the Park" at Tim Neville Arboretum on Monday 26 January 2026 for the purpose of celebrating Australia Day.
2. Note the successful application made to the National Australia Day Council for \$10,000 to support this event.
3. Allocate \$30,000 (ex GST) of additional funding for this event to be delivered.

1. DISCUSSION

Councillors have previously indicated an interest in hosting a stand-alone Australia Day event in 2026. Feedback on potential event options was recently discussed with Councillors.

Following is a summary of the discussions:

1. Relationship with Citizenship Ceremonies:

- In recent years, demand has required the delivery of three Citizenship Ceremonies; it is confirmed that 3 ceremonies will be conducted in January 2026.
- Any Australia Day event will need to be coordinated to complement the Citizenship Ceremonies, as the two will influence each other.

2. Venues and Capacity:

- Potential locations discussed included the Civic Centre, Marie Wallace Reserve, Lewis Park, and the Knox Community Arts Centre.
- Considerations included capacity limits, weather contingencies, and accessibility.

3. Event Concepts:

- Ideas included a community picnic or BBQ with food trucks, coffee vans, music, or a social sporting activity such as a multicultural cricket match.
- Potential involvement of local community groups in providing catering and engagement opportunities was also discussed, including organisations such as Lions, Rotary, Foothills Community Care, and Scouts.
- The need for food trucks and an ice cream van.

4. Event Timing and Structure:

- Options discussed included day and evening activities on Australia Day, and weekends in the lead up to Australia Day - noting Australia Day falls on a Monday in 2026.
- Integrating community events around Citizenship Ceremonies was supported, ensuring locations are close enough to attract attendees from both events and ensure Councillors could attend both events.

5. Program Development:

- Support was expressed for starting with a small-scale inaugural event to prove the concept and allow for growth over time.
- Some preference was indicated for a smaller event at a smaller location initially, expanding to a larger event at larger site (such as Lewis Park) over time.

6. Awards and Marketing:

- The importance of a strong marketing “hook” to attract audiences was noted.
- The inclusion of a Citizen of the Year Award was considered but not recommended for the 2026 event.

7. Budget and Feasibility:

- The event would require significant resources, including event management, logistics, and pre- and post-event set up and pack-up.
- Due to limited internal capacity, outsourcing event delivery in 2026 will be necessary.
- No budget has been allocated for this event in the 2025/26 financial year, and it is not currently included as a featured activity in any service plans.

Councillors’ feedback supported:

That officers continue to explore options for an event to acknowledge and celebrate Australia Day in 2026, including obtaining a quotation. There was general support for:

- Holding the event near the Civic Centre (Tim Neville Arboretum) in the first year.
- Scheduling the event to accommodate the Citizenship Ceremonies (12pm – 2pm for Councillor attendance); and
- Ensuring the event provides a strong reason for community attendance.
- Explore the option of a cricket match
- Review the catering options

Noting:

- Due to budget and resource limitations, officers propose outsourcing the management and delivery of the event, at least for the first year.

1.1 Venue

An initial desktop venue options analysis was undertaken (refer Attachment 1) assessing four sites - Marie Wallace Reserve, Lewis Park, Knox Community Arts Centre (Grounds) and Tim Neville Arboretum. Whilst all the sites are popular as family and community destinations, some will likely draw attendance on Australia Day independent of any planned Council event. The promotion of a community barbecue / picnic at one of these locations would benefit from existing patronage, as the locations themselves provide a drawcard that Council can build upon with marketing and other low-cost activities.

Ultimately, Tim Neville Arboretum has been identified as the officer recommended location for an event. Australia Day is recognised as a date of mixed significance, noting cultural sensitivity, it could be perceived as inappropriate or disrespectful. Council officers will work with the contractor to design an event that is inclusive and welcoming.

1.2 Proposed Event Outline - Knox Australia Day Picnic in the Park

Following discussions with internal stakeholders, a proposed event outline has been developed for an Australia Day Picnic in the Park:

Project Overview

- A family-friendly, low-cost “Picnic in the Park” style event held on Australia Day
- Complemented by Australia Day themed decorations, Council engaged food trucks and low-key entertainment/activities to encourage community connection.
- The event would run from 10am – 2pm with formal activities between 12pm-2pm (between Citizenship Ceremonies held at the Civic Centre).

Objectives

- Provide a low-key but welcoming, positive, inclusive and connected opportunity for the community to celebrate Australia Day. (Target scale 150-200 people.)
- Encourage the local community to bring their own food, rugs, and chairs, with the option to enjoy Council subsidised elements including a potential barbeque, food trucks and entertainment.
- To leverage an already well-used and accessible destination, to maximise attendance by people of all ages and backgrounds, while remaining low-cost and sustainable.
- Building community spirit, by offering a safe, enjoyable space and opportunity for shared celebration.
- Establish a modest but meaningful starting point that can be built upon in future years, allowing Council to refine the format and grow the scale and reach of the celebration over time.

Event Components

- Food: BYO picnic complemented by Food trucks
- Entertainment: Live performer/music
- Decorative elements - Australian Flags and other Australia Day paraphernalia / collateral
- Civic Element: Opportunity for Mayor / Councillors to welcome the community
- Budget dependent additions could include low cost, low-key activities e.g. face painting, lawn games (e.g. giant Jenga, chess, quoits).

Noting: Officers are continuing discussions with the cricket clubs regarding a possible display event. Given that parking at the cricket facility will be needed to accommodate attendees of the main Australia Day event, this option may need to be deferred and explored for a future year.

Delivery Model

- Council officers can provide some oversight and equipment for the day, but event would be delivered in partnership with an external contractor/event company.

2. ENGAGEMENT

To date, internal engagement has been limited to Councillors, the Community Strengthening Department and the Active and Creative Communities Department.

A quote has been obtained from an event company to ensure estimates of cost were in line with current industry costs.

No additional external engagement has been undertaken to date.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Holding an Australia Day event offers an opportunity for the community to come together in a shared space, fostering social connection, inclusion, and expressions of civic and national pride. It is important to recognise, however, that the day holds different symbolic meaning for different groups, and that the decision to hold or not hold an event, and the programming of any event held, may influence how various parts of the community feel represented and acknowledged.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

The implications of an Australia Day event for Council's Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040 goal, and exposure to climate risks will depend on the nature and scale of the event.

Factors such as energy use, waste generation, transport impacts, and procurement choices (e.g. single-use items, food sourcing) may all influence the event's environmental footprint

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

As previously indicated, the environmental implications of an Australia Day event will depend on its type, scale, and delivery details. The proposed event is considered to have relatively low environmental impact, with standard practices expected to be sufficient to mitigate any minor effects.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Due to budget and resource constraints, if the event proceeds, officers propose to outsource the management and delivery of the event. Future capacity to deliver and support the event would be dependent upon ongoing budget allocations and review of capacity within the Festivals and Events team, given the competing priority of Citizenship Ceremonies on the same day.

A quote has been obtained from an event company (refer to Confidential Attachment 3). Subject to Council's support to proceed with the event, and confirmation of a detailed event plan, this quote may need to be refined.

Description	Total Amount
Infrastructure	\$6,620
Traffic Management	\$3,280
Production	\$2,150
Programming	\$3,600
Contractor Service	\$6,500
Risk Management and Permits	\$1,352
Staffing	\$2,060
Food Vendors	\$2,700
Merchandise and Branding	\$2,010
Marketing	\$750
Event Administration and Planning	\$11,850
Miscellaneous	\$135
Contingency	\$1,000
Total	\$44,007
Less NADC Grant	\$10,000
Grand Total	\$34,007

* Note – Costs are inclusive of Public Holiday Rates and GST

The National Australia Day Council (NADC) Community Events Grant Program supports communities across Australia to host inclusive Australia Day events promoting the theme: 'Reflect. Respect. Celebrate.' Notification was received on 30 October 2025 that Council's application has been approved for the maximum \$10,000 grant. Should Council not support an Australia Day event the grant could be declined and funds returned.

Conditions of the grant require the use of NADC Australia Day branding and collateral materials clearly in equal proportion to other branding and marketing used on the day, and in the lead up to, and on, Australia Day 2026. Example collateral is included at Attachment 2.

7. RISKS

Reputational and Community Risks

- Australia Day continues to generate mixed community views. There is a risk of divergent views leading to reputational harm if the event is perceived as insensitive, exclusionary, or inconsistent with reconciliation objectives.
- There is potential for peaceful protest or activist action near the event, which may affect event operations, attendee comfort, or generate media coverage. This may arise as a result of divergent views regarding Australia Day or reflect nationalistic / anti-immigration sentiments that were recently observed in nationwide rallies on 31 August 2025.

Operational and Logistical Risks

- Rain, extreme heat or other severe weather (e.g. storms or fire danger) may affect attendance, safety, or event viability.
- There are a range of event risks associated with crowd behaviour, public safety, and capacity management.
- Parking congestion or inadequate vehicle or pedestrian traffic management could create community frustration or safety risks around the venue.

- Competing operational priorities and existing workloads are a constraint for current staff to support event planning, coordination, and on-the-day delivery.

Financial and Delivery Risks

- Limited internal resources will constrain planning and oversight, if outsourced.
- Lower-than-expected attendance could lead to surplus food, wasted stock, and reduced vendor confidence in future participation. Conversely, higher-than-expected attendance could strain food service capacity, leading to long queues, dissatisfaction, or inadequate provision for attendees.

Environmental Risks

- Litter, food waste, and damage to parkland or facilities may require additional cleanup and restoration efforts.

Mitigation strategies for the risks identified above will need to be developed and refined and would be expected to include:

- Incorporating respectful and inclusive elements in programming to acknowledge diverse perspectives on Australia Day.
- Strong communication and media protocols to manage community expectations and respond to concerns.
- A risk management plan will deal with contingency and safety plans for weather, crowd, and traffic management.
- A clear event plan, incorporating deliverables, defined responsibilities, and risk monitoring, will ensure timely delivery, accountability, and effective issue resolution.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

Embracing connection, inclusion and diversity

Strategy 2.1 - Our community's diverse needs are addressed by ensuring equity and inclusion are considered in decision making and strategic planning.

Strategy 2.4 - There are opportunities for social connection and active living through planning, provision of facilities, program delivery and support for local groups.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

Attachment 3 is included in the confidential agenda, as it contains confidential information pursuant to Council's Governance Rules and Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2020, as it relates to private commercial information (being the name and details of a company) which would be unreasonable to disclose publicly.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - Venue Options Analysis [**4.3.1** - 2 pages]
2. Attachment 2 - Example NADC Collateral [**4.3.2** - 1 page]

Venue Options Analysis

	Marie Wallace	Tim Neville Arboretum	Lewis Park	Knox Community Arts Centre
Attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-generational playground and play-space options Open space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playground options (north end) Open space Gardens and walks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Space Skate Park Very basic playground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Space
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking Good public transport connections Bikepath 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking Limited public transport connections Bikepath 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking Limited public transport connections Bikepath 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking Good public transport connections
Toilets	Yes On site adjacent to playground	Yes On site (north end)	Yes On site in Lewis Park Reserve Pavilion	Yes On site in KCAC
Weather contingency	Limited contingency space at Fairpark Junior Football Club	Limited pavilions (south end)	Limited contingency space at Lewis Park Reserve Pavilion	Inside Arts Centre subject to event design and availability
Other	Nearby shopping centre providing passing traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barbecue Facilities (south end) Auditorium space for speeches / performance (south end) Flag poles – at War Memorial 	Blind Creek Trail & Upgrades	Nearby shopping centre and venues providing passing traffic
Site Based Collaboration Opportunities	Onsite / nearby clubs & groups such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bayswater Rotary Bayswater Football & Junior Football Clubs Knox Road Runners Bayswater Senior Citizen's Club Bayswater CFA 	Nearby groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EACH Upper Ferntree Gully Junior Football Club 	Tenant clubs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knox City Cricket Club Fairpark Junior Football Club Knox District Scouts 	Onsite / nearby clubs & groups such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bayswater CFA Bayswater Rotary Bayswater Football & Junior Football Clubs Knox Road Runners Bayswater Senior Citizen's Club
Travel to Citizenship Ceremonies	Approx 6 km / 10 minutes from Civic Centre by car	Approx 5 km / 10 minutes from Civic Centre by car	Approx 1.5km / 5 minutes from Civic Centre by car	Approx 6 km / 10 minutes from Civic Centre by car

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Example National Australia Day Council (NADC) Collateral



4.4 Councillor Appointments to the Knox Local Safety Committee

Final Report Destination:	Council
Paper Type:	For Decision
Author:	Manager Community Strengthening, Kerry Jansons
Executive:	Director, Connected Communities, Judy Chalkley

SUMMARY

At its meeting on 25 August 2025, Council unanimously agreed that the creation of a Local Safety Committee (LSC), in partnership with Victoria Police, represents a positive, collaborative, and outcome-focused initiative to address safety concerns within Knox. To this end, Councillors signed a letter of endorsement on 11 September 2025 to Acting Inspector Darke, at Knox Police, for a Local Safety Committee to be established.

The LSC will be co-chaired by Victoria Police and Knox City Council and will have representatives from both Victoria Police and Knox City Council as well as other key stakeholders such as EACH, Infolink, Department of Justice, etc. The Committee will meet four times per year during business hours with the Terms of Reference to be approved at the first meeting.

It is proposed that two Councillors be nominated to sit on this Committee for a 12-month duration. As the first meeting of this Committee is on 20 November the nominations are required to take place prior to the usual process of committee allocation that occur annually.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to appoint two Councillors, being Councillor _____ and Councillor _____, as Council's representatives to the Local Safety Committee convened by Victoria Police effective from 20 November 2025 until 30 November 2026 or until Council resolves otherwise.

1. DISCUSSION

1.1 Background

Knox City Council has a long history in supporting crime prevention initiatives to reduce the incidence of crime and improve perceptions of safety. However, community safety has been a growing concern across Victoria in recent times, and this is felt at a local level in Knox.

The Knox City Council survey for the Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029 showed that 77% of people reported concerns about crime. Furthermore, data obtained from the Knox Council Community Satisfaction Survey showed a decrease in perceptions of safety from 2024 to 2025. The data showed that perception of safety in public areas during the day decreased to 7.9 down from 8.6, in and around the local shopping district/centre decreased to 7.5 down from 8.1 and at night decreased to 6.5 down from 7.2.

In recognition of increasing community concerns, a Notice of Motion No. 184 – Crime Rate and Community Safety was tabled at the Council Meeting held on 25 August 2025, seeking to endorse the Victoria Police initiative to implement a Local Safety Committee (LSC). This Motion was unanimously supported by Councillors.

The LSC will be an action-focused committee with representatives from Victoria Police, Knox City Council and local service providers. It is proposed that two Councillors are also members of this Committee, which is similar to other Advisory Committees of Council.

The inaugural LSC meeting will be held on 20 November 2025 and focus on agreement of the Terms of Reference and an initial discussion regarding the development of a Local Safety Plan, which will identify key priority areas related to safety concerns and shared solutions.

Council's Director Connected Communities, Judy Chalkley, and Acting Inspector Malcolm Darke, Victoria Police, will be the co-chairs of the LSC. The LSC will focus on projects and initiatives requiring collaboration that produce a positive community safety outcome.

Objectives of the LSC may include:

- Work with communities to improve their actual and perception of safety within Knox;
- Support, promote and assist to identify opportunities for community led crime prevention activities;
- Advocate for services and attract programs which contribute to the safety of residents and visitors to the Knox area;
- Look at funding opportunities to promote the implementation of safety programs;
- Acknowledge and identify actions to improve the Knox community's concerns as identified in the annual Engage Victoria Community Safety survey; and
- Share information and intelligence regarding local safety issues and work collaboratively to respond to these issues.

The LSC will meet four times per year. Preliminary dates to be approved are:

- Thursday, 20 November, 9.00 am – 12.00 pm (confirmed);
- Wednesday, 18 February, 10.00 am – 12.00 pm (tentative);
- Wednesday, 27th May, 10.30 am – 12.30 pm (tentative); and
- Wednesday, 19 August, 10.00 am – 12.00 pm (tentative).

2. ENGAGEMENT

No engagement has been undertaken in relation to this report.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Council is supportive of the establishment of the Local Safety Committee and working in partnership with Victoria Police to address community safety in Knox, sending a message to Knox residents that their safety and perception of safety is important.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the recommendation is considered to have no direct implications or has no direct impacts upon Council's Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040, exposure to climate risks or climate change adaptation.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications as a result of this report.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial costs to Council in relation to this report.

7. RISKS

There are no risks associated with this report.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

Enhancing community connection to vital services and resources

Strategy 1.5 - Our community's health and wellbeing is improved through proactive planning, delivery, partnerships and advocacy that enable access to services, education and programs.

Being a strong voice for safety

Strategy 5.3 - Our community is more secure, connected and feel less isolated through planning, partnerships, advocacy and targeted support for our most vulnerable.

Strategy 5.4 - People feel safe in their homes and in the community through the development of partnerships, planning and promotion of programs, services and education that focus on connection, safety and respect.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no content in this report that meets the definition of confidential information from the Local Government Act 2020.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

4.5 Eastern Region Group of Councils

Final Report Destination:	Council
Paper Type:	For Discussion
Author:	Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Dobson
Executive:	Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Dobson

SUMMARY

Knox Council is a member of a number of regional groupings that comprise multiple Councils coming together in a formal way to work together and advocate for particular outcomes. These groupings include the Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG).

Council received a report at its meeting on 24 March 2025 in response to Notice of Motion 163 providing, in part, a summary of achievements of the ERG and the cost of membership. Council resolved at that meeting to receive a further report to a Council meeting enabling Council to re-evaluate its membership of ERG.

This report responds to the 24 March 2025 Council resolution and includes information on ERG and its activities during 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Receive and note this report including information on the Eastern Region Group of Councils and its activities during 2025.
2. Continue its membership of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.

1. DISCUSSION

Knox Council is a member of a number of regional groupings that comprise multiple Councils coming together in a formal way to work together and advocate for particular outcomes. These groupings include the Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG).

Regional groupings allow for collaboration and pooling of effort to focus on outcomes that will benefit the region as a whole, and also use their collective voice to highlight and amplify the needs and advocacy efforts of individual Councils.

Membership

ERG currently comprises five Councils – Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. ERG meetings held every two months are attended by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or other appointed Councillor, Chief Executive Officers of each of the five Councils, and the ERG Executive Officer. Knox is currently represented on the ERG by Mayor Cooper and Deputy Mayor Atwell. The CEOs of the five Councils also meet with the Executive Officer in-between the wider ERG meetings to work on ERG initiatives, monitor progress and plan future agendas and activities.

The ERG Chair and Deputy Chair are elected each year by the Councillor members. Councillor Deirdre Diamante, Mayor of Manningham, is the current ERG Chair and Councillor Kylie Spears, Mayor of Maroondah, is the current ERG Deputy Chair.

An Agreement exists between the five Councils which includes provisions for membership. This allows for new members, by supplementary Agreement, and notes that a member may withdraw from the Agreement with not less than 12 months' notice of its intention to do so.

A recent amendment to the ERG Councils Agreement provides for improved continuity of Councillor representatives across a Council term, with the Mayor of each Council to be a representative each year, along with one other Councillor for the four-year Council term.

Cost

Council membership fees for ERG are currently \$35,000 per annum (excluding GST). This funding contributes toward ERG's payment of an Executive Officer and support staff, along with external project costs.

Strategic Plan

ERG's activities are guided by the ERG Strategic Plan. The current Strategic Plan runs from 2025-2029, in line with the timing of Council Plans, and was finalised in mid-2025 following consultation with each of the member Councils.

ERG's overall vision is *for the region to be connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous, supported by financially secure, high performing councils.*

There are four key pillars outlined in the Strategic Plan

- People – resilient and cohesive communities who enjoy an improving quality of life, great access to services and better health and wellbeing.
- Places – great places that foster social cohesion, equality of opportunity, are resource efficient and healthy, in a region that's easy to get around by active or public transport for short distances.
- Economy – local employment opportunities support a diverse and adaptable workforce who enjoy a connected, competitive, and prosperous future.
- Environment – environmental stewardship with spaces for people and nature, where regional responses support sustainability and climate resilience.

To support the four pillars listed above, the Strategic Plan includes five key strategic priorities:

- Build shared services and increase joint procurement
- Enhance regional infrastructure
- Transform movement in the East
- Support community safety
- Develop local employment

The five priorities were identified and informed with reference to the Council Plans of the member Councils. For each priority, actions have been identified that seek multiple benefits across the pillars, supported by ERG governance, operations and advocacy.

The ERG Strategic Plan 2025-2029 is included at **Attachment 1**.

Annual Reports

ERG produces an Annual Report each year which includes, among other things, a list of achievements for the year.

Key achievements for the **2024/25** financial year drawn from the most recent Annual Report are summarised below.

Eighteen actions informed the annual (2024/25) workplan, with the focus for the final year of the 2021-25 Strategic Plan being the 2024 council elections and new ERG leadership group, new Council Plans and the development of the new ERG Strategic Plan. Implementation highlights include:

- Strong **advocacy** to the State Government regarding the Housing Statement, Plan for Victoria, and a series of planning reforms to the Victoria Planning Provisions and Planning Schemes. A Regional Planning Navigator was prepared to assist community understanding of the reforms and to frame advocacy efforts. The Federal Election provided the opportunity to articulate and present eastern region priorities to the Commonwealth Government. Other advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils, regional infrastructure needs and social and affordable housing.
- Induction of a **new ERG membership** following the 2024 council elections. This included governance processes such as the election of the Chair and Deputy Chair.
- Developed a new **Strategic Plan for 2025-2029**, consulting widely with member councils and partners. For the first time, this also involved a Council Plan working group resulting in member councils referencing the Plan in their Council Plans and committing to collaborative efforts with the ERG.
- Continued support of the Eastern Region Procurement Network to accelerate **joint procurement** as a first step toward shared services. This has involved developing a Regional Procurement Policy Framework, data analysis and the preparation of a Regional Roadmap. Opportunities are now being realised as part of a regional pipeline and through early market engagement.
- Ongoing operational support to deliver bi-monthly ERG and CEO meetings, as well as direct project delivery and regular **communication** to members.
- Productive relationships with key stakeholders through the ERG website, social media (LinkedIn page) and e-newsletter and meeting regularly with Council Communications teams.

The ERG 2024/25 Annual Report is included at **Attachment 2**.

For background, a summary of ERG achievements over the previous three financial years (2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24) drawn from the annual reports for those years is included at **Attachment 3**.

Advocacy

A key focus of ERG's work in the past 12 months has been the development of an ERG advocacy platform for the May 2025 Federal election and an ERG State Advocacy Platform.

The Federal advocacy platform is included in **Attachment 4** and the State advocacy platform is included in **Attachment 5**.

These have been circulated to and discussed with local MPs individually, and through group meetings with MPs.

Other recent key advocacy activities have included:

- Development of Plan East, a proposition for sustainable growth in the region, and a submission to the State Government's Plan for Victoria consultation process. Further detail on this work and links to the documents prepared are included here - [Plan East and A Plan for Victoria - Eastern Region Group of Councils](#).
- Meeting with Minister Kilkeny in September 2025 to discuss Plan East and key planning aspirations of ERG and challenges being experienced, including windfall gains tax.
- Submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions, Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274, in April 2025.
- Submission to Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year infrastructure strategy, in April 2025.

Collaboration and shared services

ERG Councils have for some time sought to work together on joint procurement initiatives. Further to this, a key current focus for ERG is on building shared services and increasing joint procurement. This focus is included in the ERG Strategic Plan priorities as noted above, and is also reflected in the Council Plans of each of the member Councils. ERG is committed to developing a longer-term, logical pathway to increase shared services and joint procurement by councils in the region and to undertake the foundational work required to see this occur. Specific actions are included in the Strategic Plan against this priority, one of which is developing a shared services roadmap, with a detailed analysis of short-listed opportunity areas to develop an implementation plan.

2. ENGAGEMENT

There has been no external consultation undertaken in relation to this report.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

ERG contributes to improved outcomes for communities within the eastern region, with 'people' being reflected in ERG's key pillars.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

ERG undertakes advocacy and a number of actions that contribute to its environment pillar and climate change impacts, including building climate resilience, increasing active transport, biodiversity and urban greening.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

As noted, ERG has initiatives focused on broader amenity and environmental improvements within the eastern region.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Council membership fees for ERG are currently \$35,000 per annum (excluding GST). This funding contributes toward ERG's payment of an Executive Officer and support staff, along with external project costs.

7. RISKS

There are no specific risk implications to note in this report.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

The Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029 notes Knox Council's partnership with the ERG, working together to achieve joint outcomes for our communities. The Plan notes:

The ERG is committed to work together to develop opportunities for shared services, joint procurement and the shared use of community infrastructure. As a member of the ERG Knox can amplify Council's voice and impact, be more efficient and effective, and improve community access to infrastructure and services across the municipality.

With ERG's Strategic Plan being developed with reference to the Council Plans across the region, the work undertaken by ERG at a regional level supports many of the strategies included within the Knox Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029, including:

Enhancing community connection to vital services and resources

Strategy 1.1 - A variety of transport options is available through the effective planning, advocacy and management of efficient, active, sustainable and accessible transport modes, particularly in growth locations.

Strategy 1.3 - Local businesses and our economy are strong and resilient and there are increased employment opportunities through development, attracting investment, embracing technology and innovation, and advocacy.

Strategy 1.5 - Our community's health and wellbeing is improved through proactive planning, delivery, partnerships and advocacy that enable access to services, education and programs.

Embracing connection, inclusion and diversity

Strategy 2.3 - Our community is supported to thrive during all stages of life through the promotion and provision of services, advocacy and partnerships with local service providers.

Caring for and enhancing our environment

Strategy 3.2 - Green spaces and waterways are protected, enhanced and enjoyed through planning, promotion and maintenance of our built and natural environment.

Leading, listening and governing responsibly

Strategy 4.4 - The changing needs of our community are met through informed policy and strategy that maximises value, collaboration and partnerships with other councils and local organisations.

Being a strong voice for safety

Strategy 5.1 - Our community feels safer in public spaces and facilities through planning, maintenance, education, design and proactive program delivery for Council owned and managed spaces and via advocacy for others.

Planning our future city

Strategy 6.4 Our community's expectations and aspirations for housing development and land use are considered through planning, advocacy, partnerships and decision-making.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no content in this report that meets the definition of confidential information from the Local Government Act 2020.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - ERG Strategic Plan 2025-2029 [4.5.1 - 10 pages]
2. Attachment 2 - ERG Annual Report 2024-25 [4.5.2 - 8 pages]
3. Attachment 3 - Summary of achievements [4.5.3 - 3 pages]
4. Attachment 4 - ERG Advocacy Platform - 2025 [4.5.4 - 17 pages]
5. Attachment 5 - ERG State Advocacy Platform 2025 [4.5.5 - 19 pages]



Strategic Plan

2025 - 2029



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Indigenous acknowledgement

The ERG recognises the Traditional Owners of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

Background & context

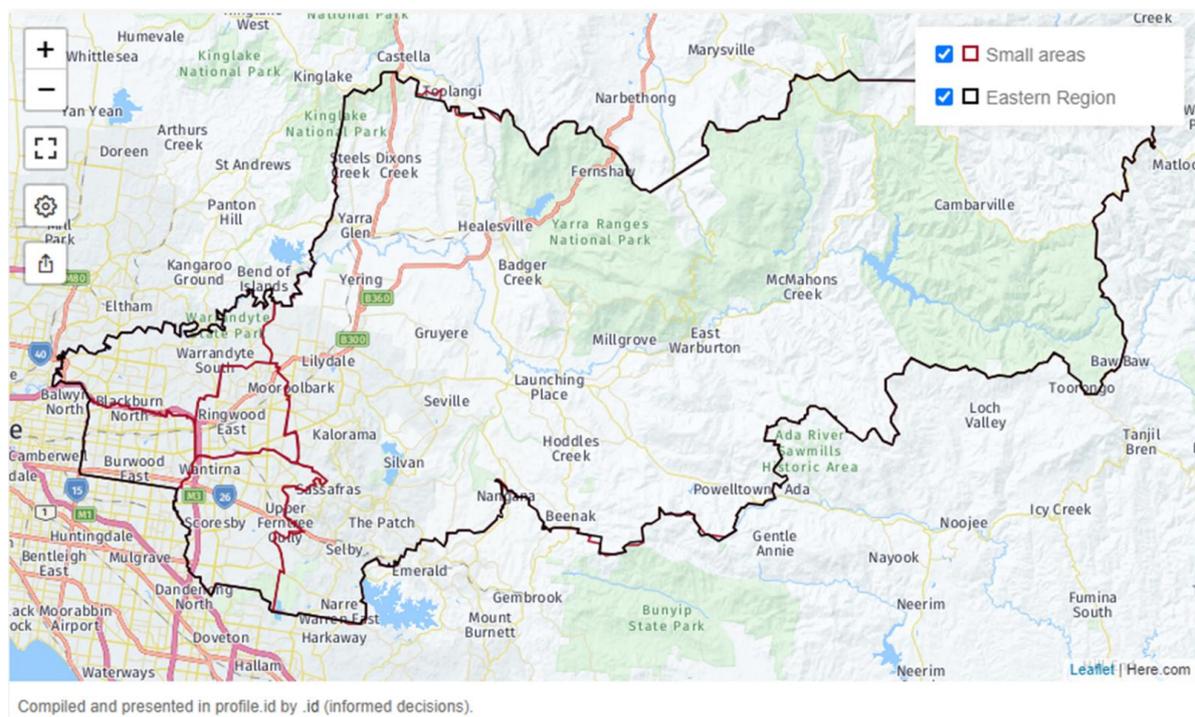
Who we are

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) comprises five local government authorities of eastern Melbourne - Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse, and Yarra Ranges.

The eastern region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

ERG councils collaborate and partner on shared priorities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services, and joint procurement to benefit the communities of the region.

The region extends from 15 kilometres to Melbourne's CBD eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It is a major population centre with a significant industry base. Specialisations are in advanced manufacturing, wholesale /distribution, health services, education (including Universities and TAFE institutes), as well as retail, tourism, and other service industries. The area includes the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre, Ringwood Metropolitan Activity Centre, the Bayswater Business Precinct, and major education and health services.



Residents enjoy a choice of health and recreation facilities, local and regional shopping destinations, access to leading schools and tertiary institutions, and some of Victoria's best recreational areas. The region functions as Melbourne's lungs, with extensive green wedge and natural areas, mature canopy trees and is Melbourne's primary water catchment.

Recent State Government commitments to housing growth seek a 71 per cent increase in housing by 2050. Without a commitment to ensure community infrastructure keeps pace with growth existing levels of amenity will be impacted.

The region's economy is significant, hosting 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and generating over \$49 billion Gross Regional Product. While the manufacturing sector is of greatest value it is not the largest employer. The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance, retail trade, education & training, manufacturing, and construction.



Total population

746,067

(Approximately 14% of Greater Melbourne's total)



Total Land areas (hectares)

282,120

(28% of Greater Melbourne's 999,251 hectares)



Gross regional product (\$M)

\$49,478

(Approximately 11% of Greater Melbourne's total)

What we do

'Our vision is for the region to be connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous, supported by financially secure, high performing councils.'

To achieve our vision the ERG will:

- be a catalyst for collaboration and trusted voice on regionally significant matters
- work to create an enabling operating environment
- support councils to be more efficient and effective
- advocate and plan to improve access to infrastructure and services across the region

To be successful we focus on:

- activities that benefit all ERG councils and reduce duplication
- projects that have active support and are achievable
- avoiding competing interests and tensions
- strong engagement and building productive working relationships critical to our success
- good governance and management of ERG resources

How we work:

Collaboration and partnerships are critical to how we work. Our collective concerns are informed both by their impacts and by our ability to impact change and achieve shared outcomes

Many external factors impact on the region, others involve shared responsibilities, and many are often beyond local government's direct control.

Our responses range from awareness raising to direct action in support of our vision and four pillars. Our Strategic Plan is implemented through a focussed number of regional actions that consider the following criteria:

- is it a big issue for the region (impacting and/or benefitting all councils)?
- will our action lead to better community outcomes?
- is it achievable – will we make a difference?
- will we create shared value for ERG councils?
- will we reduce duplication / competition?

What's important to us

The ERG councils have more in common than what sets the group apart. Through extensive community engagement, Councils identified what is most important to their communities, and together for the region. These are grouped into four areas, or pillars: People, Places, Economy, and Environment and a longer-term regional outcome and key stakeholders have been identified for each.

People



PEOPLE

Resilient, cohesive communities who enjoy an improving quality of life, great access to services and better health and wellbeing.

- Eastern Health
- Eastern Volunteers
- Eastern Access Community Health (EACH)
- Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA); Homelessness & Social Housing Charter Group
- VicHealth and Departments including Education; Health; Families, Fairness & Housing; Emergency Management Victoria

Improving community health and wellbeing is central to diverse, inclusive and cohesive communities, better able to withstand major shocks and stresses. Equity of access to opportunity and addressing hardship and disadvantage builds social cohesion and increases community safety, while improving employment and life outcomes.

Increasing rates of crime, particularly family violence remains a complex issue for all levels of government. A more strategic, regional response for community safety is needed, and to address underlying causal factors such as access to secure and affordable housing, education and employment.

Rapid population growth is the biggest challenge facing ERG councils in their efforts to support communities. It will directly impact communities' ability to access the services and community infrastructure they depend on. The perception of government that the region can simply absorb and accommodate growth without the focussed funding support available to Melbourne's growth areas will compound these impacts.

Opportunities in the region exist to share council services to make them more efficient and effective. This may relate to internal council functions or to service areas such as immunisation, school crossing supervisors, animal management, environmental health, parks and gardens to regional library administration.

Places



PLACES

Great places that foster social cohesion, equality of opportunity, are resource efficient and healthy, in a region that's easy to get around by active or public transport for short distances.

- Infrastructure Victoria
- Department of Transport and Planning
- Transport advocacy groups such as Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF), Bicycle Victoria (BV), Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)
- Eastern Region Trails Working Group (ERTWG)
- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Planning and development industry peaks (PIA, PCV, UDIA, etc.)
- Council Alliance for Sustainable Built Environments (CASBE)

Population growth increases demands on public spaces and facilities and changes how we move around. Active centres build neighbourhoods and support economic, social and cultural activities. Vibrant activity centres are essential for high amenity neighbourhoods and to achieve living locally. Housing targets set by the State Government in *Plan for Victoria* require ERG Councils to plan for an additional 212,500 dwellings by 2050, an increase of 71 per cent on existing dwelling stock. This has significant implications for community infrastructure that will either need to be newly provided or

upgraded to meet future demand. Collaboration is required to clearly communicate these community infrastructure needs to State Government and ensure that they are provided for in key locations in the region.

Transport connections across the region have not kept pace with needs, and increasing congestion has made travel to jobs and services more difficult. There are opportunities for advocacy and collaborative integrated transport planning with State Government; to review and invest in bus services; and for other practical and cost-effective improvements that support people to access work, study and services. Other opportunities for joint procurement, integrated planning, and for shared services exist around asset management and to leverage regional strengths and knowledge through centres of excellence.

Economy



ECONOMY

Local employment opportunities support a diverse and adaptable workforce who enjoy a connected, competitive, and prosperous future.

- Melbourne's East Regional Economic Development Group (MEREDG)
- North-East Local Jobs & Skills Taskforce
- Economic Growth Victoria
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENS)
- Secondary and Tertiary education sectors
- Industry groups such as SEMMA and NORTH Link

The region's economy is significant and diverse and enjoys well-developed infrastructure and access to a highly skilled workforce. In our activity centres and across specialised activity clusters are 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs that contribute around \$50 billion in Gross Regional Product (GRP). A growing number and diversity of local jobs and businesses are needed to sustain local communities and support a high quality of life. While regional employment has grown, the number of positions advertised online has decreased nearly 50 per cent since the peak of 10,489 in July 2022.

Opportunities exist around a shared vision and effective collaboration for increasing local employment in activity centres, business precincts such as Bayswater, and to support key sectors such as tourism and agriculture in the outer east. Leveraging State Government precinct planning could result in better local employment outcomes. Resource conservation and climate action can also stimulate uptake of new technologies and create new industries and jobs.

Environment



ENVIRONMENT

Environmental stewardship with spaces for people and nature, where regional responses support sustainability and climate resilience.

- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Sustainability Victoria
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- Melbourne Water
- Integrated Water Management Forum
- Eastern Region Trails Working Group
- Recycling Victoria; Sustainability Victoria; Tourism Victoria

Globally there is significant concern about the future of the planet and the need to address climate change and resource consumption for sustainable living. Human activity is leading to a hotter, drier climate with more extreme weather events causing fires, floods and landslides. Access to clean air, water and to nature are central to health and wellbeing.

While the region is known for its extensive parks and leafy suburbs, redressing the fastest rate of tree canopy loss in Melbourne will be more challenging with growth. Linking open spaces across the region for biodiversity, urban heat reduction and active transport is a focus for action. Resilience to the impacts of climate change is a common focus, particularly in areas of flooding around the Yarra River and Dandenong Creek, with greater alignment required between flood agencies. Councils in the region aspire to achieve and maintain carbon neutrality.

Resource conservation and climate action can also help stimulate economic activity and enhance social cohesion.

Our strategic priorities

To support the four pillars, five strategic priorities have been identified, informed by the emerging Council Plans. For each, actions are identified that seek multiple benefits across pillars, supported by ERG governance, operations and advocacy.

Strategic Priority 1 - Build shared services and increase joint procurement

Shared services and joint procurement present opportunities to maintain and improve council services in a rate-capped, fiscally constrained environment.

Despite potential benefits, significant technical, financial, political and risk barriers exist. The ERG is committed to developing a longer-term, logical pathway to increase shared services and joint procurement by councils in the region and to undertake the foundational work required to see this occur. This would:

- interrogate previous collaborative work by councils and LGV to inform shared service opportunities
- leverage regional knowledge and expertise to identify opportunities (both quick wins and longer term)
- benchmark IT platforms and forward commitments to create a 10–20-year vision towards a common platform
- understand corporate governance options best suited to benefit realisation and managing risk and reward.

Priority 1: Build shared services and increase joint procurement initiatives

1: Shared Services Roadmap: detailed analysis of short-listed opportunity areas to develop an implementation plan.

2: IT Integration Vision: 10-20-year vision to align ICT / ERP platforms and approaches.

3: Pilot one or two shared services / joint procurements that meet the agreed criteria.

Strategic Priority 2 - Enhance regional infrastructure

With a 71 per cent increase of housing by 2050 (212,500 additional dwellings), new and upgraded community infrastructure will be needed to meet future residents' demand. *Plan for Victoria* fails to demonstrate how and where additional infrastructure will be delivered.

While Infrastructure Victoria's draft new *30-year Infrastructure Plan* recognises the challenges of providing infrastructure in a fiscally constrained environment, the assumption remains that community infrastructure needs in established areas can simply be absorbed and provided for by local government without significant disruption.

A regional approach to quantify and spatially understand future community infrastructure is an important first step to:

- optimise use and maximise access to community infrastructure - considering cross-border cooperation
- advocate for changes to funding models
- prioritise investment and the sequencing of infrastructure delivery, including future open space connectivity needs.

Priority 2: Enhance regional infrastructure initiatives

4: Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis - spatial analysis of impact of housing targets against community infrastructure provision benchmarks to address the likely gap over time, supported by a community infrastructure prioritisation tool. This would map the region's community infrastructure and develop GIS layers.

5: Open Space Connectivity Strategy - to identify regional opportunities for open space connectivity, biodiversity and urban greening.

Strategic Priority 3 - Transform movement in the East

The eastern region is highly car dependent, with 79 per cent of trips made by car and only 7.3 per cent by public transport. With 59 per cent of households having two or more vehicles, projected growth would bring 330,000 more vehicles and congestion to the region. There is significant opportunity to reduce the number of short trips made by car and encourage more walking, cycling and public transport use.

Infrastructure Victoria research found that buses are a huge opportunity for Melbourne as the most cost-efficient public transport system which is true for the eastern region. Weaknesses and opportunities in the region's bus network are well documented and priority bus lanes, route extensions, increased frequency and other interventions are recommended.

Big build projects (LXR, SRL, NEL) are having a major impact on the region but are not place-making projects and our ability to influence is low. Safe and attractive walking and cycling routes and trails (including for e-bikes to counter distance and topography) to and within activity centres and corridors is a key objective of the ERG councils.

A *Sustainable and Integrated Transport Plan* is the necessary first step to transform movement in the east and to have more impact on how places transform. This would:

- synthesize and bring together the significant council work to date
- engage directly with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and key stakeholders to strengthen collaboration across centres, along corridors and on major projects
- build the evidence base to support planning and advocacy.

Priority 3: Transform movement in the East initiative

6: Sustainable & Integrated Transport Plan - with DTP, bring together the significant work done in this area and share transport data to:

- agree on a prioritised, evidenced list for improvements to all modes (train, tram and bus) regarding route changes, service frequency changes, gaps and on-demand services
- agree on a prioritised, evidenced list for improvements to road infrastructure
- identify key corridors and their needs
- agree best practice principles for centres including greening and active transport
- update the Regional Trails Strategy considering the impact of North East Link and Suburban Rail Link and preferred commuter and local cycling routes
- establish consistent requirements for EV charging stations
- set up a sustainable mobility monitoring index.

Strategic Priority 4 - Support community safety

Communities in the eastern region are increasingly concerned about safety with crime statistics indicating double digit growth in crime rates for most ERG councils.

While Victoria Police is the key agency responsible for community safety, the draft *National Urban Policy* highlights several areas relevant to community safety, and that our 'urban areas are safe' when there is: Inclusivity and safety in public spaces; Safety for marginalised groups; Crime prevention; and Safety in movement.

With an objective to: *Ensure community safety through policing, law enforcement and prevention activities*, the indicators¹ used by VicPol are:

- Community safety during the day and at night
- Community safety on public transport
- Crime statistics
- Number of road fatalities
- Number of road injuries.

Placemaking and well-maintained public spaces can play a part to discourage crime through measures such as adequate lighting, passive surveillance, and sightlines. Creating safe places must be central to the fast rollout of new housing.

Local government cannot address community safety issues alone. It can help to facilitate a place-based coordinated response between federal and state government and service agencies. A roundtable would assist in role clarity, information sharing, well targeted actions and clear communications to support improved community safety and perceptions of safety.

Priority 4: Support community safety initiatives

7: Community safety regional roundtable - bring community safety stakeholders together to share information, discuss collaborative actions, and establish a role and responsibility 'RASCI' to ensure role clarity and clear communications. The RASCI framework is: Responsible, Accountable, Supportive, Consulted or Informed.

Strategic Priority 5 - Develop local employment

Growing local businesses and local activities grows local employment.

Despite strong levels of employment self-containment in the eastern region, challenges remain for people with a disability, women over 45, culturally and linguistically diverse people, disengaged youth, and First Nations people in accessing employment.

The contribution of creative industries to the Victorian economy is growing year on year (\$40.5B in 2022-23) and utilises council infrastructure (galleries, museums, performing arts venues, libraries and the public realm). Festivals, events, public art and cultural programs build community and create local employment.

The ERG seeks to enhance cooperative economic development activities regionally. There is an opportunity to take a strategic approach to programming to make better use of regional infrastructure and support development pathways for artists and the region's creative industries. This should increase opportunities, leverage investments and reduce duplication.

Priority 5: Develop local employment initiatives

8: Foster co-operative economic development opportunities - identify and deliver short and longer-term opportunities for collaboration and shared activity.

9: Develop pathways for artists in the east - explore how artistic talent and the creative industries can be cultivated within the region.

¹ Source: 2023–24 Budget Paper No. 3 Service Delivery and [Victoria Police Corporate Plan 2022–2023: Priority area - Community safety](#)

Actions summary: 2025 - 2029

#	Actions to support strategic priorities	Year				Partner	Project type				Alignment			
		1	2	3	4		JP	SS	IP	AD	People	Economy	Environment	Places
1	Shared Services Roadmap					LGV, MAV					✓	✓	✓	✓
2	IT Integration Vision										✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Shared Services/Joint Procurement Pilots										✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis					DTP/IV					✓			✓
5	Open Space Connectivity Strategy					SRV					✓		✓	✓
6	Sustainable & Integrated Transport Plan					DTP					✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Community safety regional roundtable					VicPol					✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Foster co-operative economic development opportunities										✓	✓		✓
9	Develop pathways for artists in the east										✓	✓		
ERG Governance, Operations and Advocacy														
10	Foster productive relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate sharing of best practice approaches to organisational development and service delivery.										✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Support regional responses to legislative and regulatory reviews impacting councils (P&E Act review)										✓	✓	✓	✓
12	As a single trusted voice on regionally significant matters, coordinate and support strategic and opportunistic advocacy to benefit ERG councils (e.g. longer council plan cycle; State election advocacy)										✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Deliver ERG meetings, CEO meetings, project support & communications (annual report, website & social media)										✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Council elections, Council Plan alignment and ERG Strategic Plan mid-term and full review										✓	✓	✓	✓

ERG discrete project
 Implementation / monitoring project outcomes
 Ongoing / BAU activity



Annual Report

2024/25

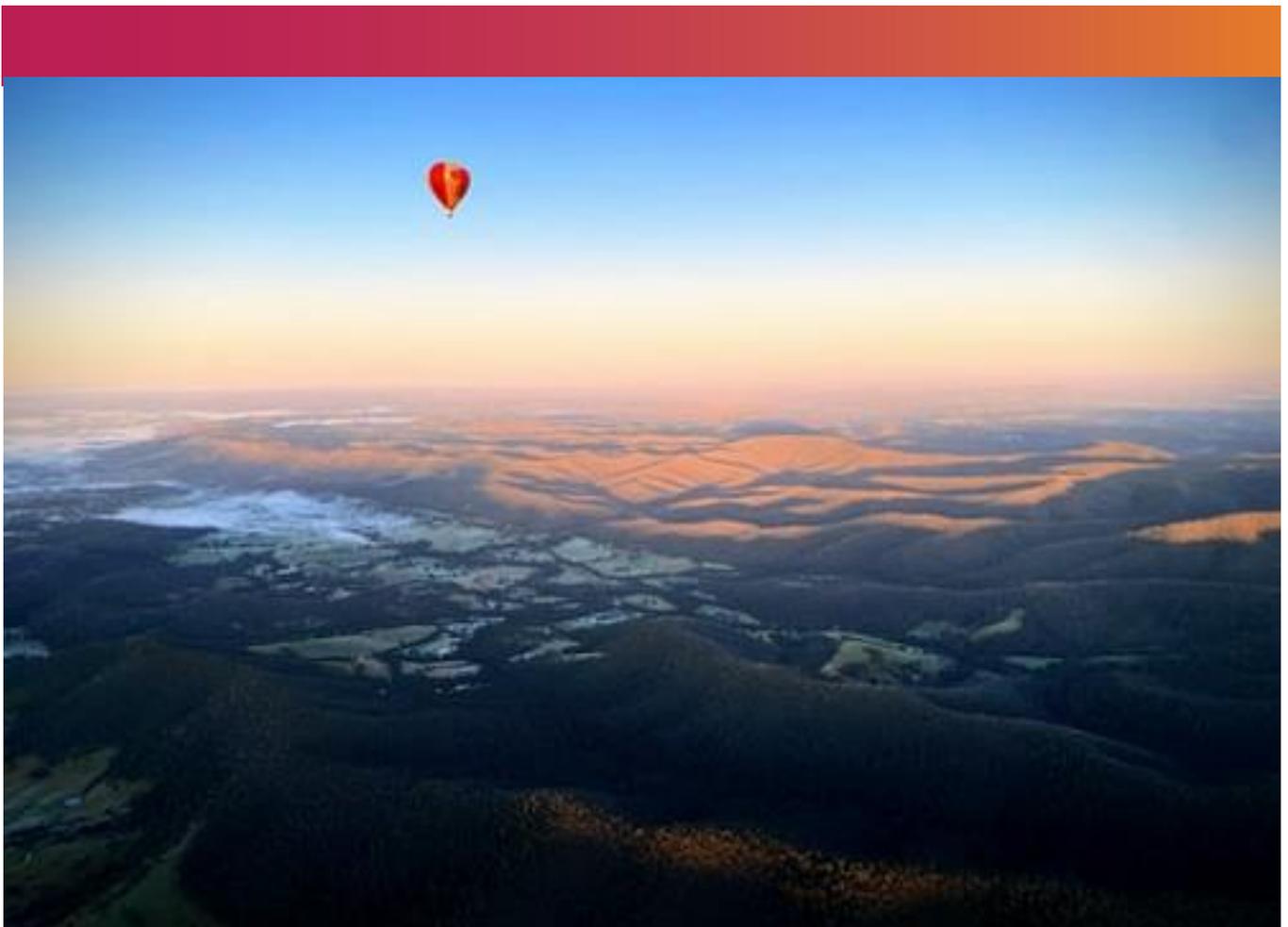


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Members & meeting attendance 2024/25	7

Acknowledgement of Country

The ERG recognises the traditional custodians of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

From the Chair

Welcome to the 2025 Annual Report of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.

As a group of five Local Government Authorities we share a vision for Melbourne's east, and a commitment to work together to improve outcomes for our communities.

This report provides an update about our activities, working closely with officer groups, other regional alliances, government and stakeholders.

Local government elections in October 2024 saw a new ERG leadership group. Despite significant change to many councils, we enjoyed a smooth transition with nearly all ERG Mayors and Deputy Mayors having had ERG involvement previously.

While we moved quickly to finalise our strategic and advocacy priorities, including the review and development of our next strategic plan, our focus on positioning the region to manage growth and cost of living pressures remained a priority.

The broad ranging State Government planning reforms to implement higher housing growth targets and the high level *Plan for Victoria* bring with them opportunities and risks for our communities. Without a local government 'seat at the table' providing local input and expertise the voice of the community is diminished and decades of local experience managing growth ignored.

Our federal election advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils, regional infrastructure and transport needs, and climate resilience, and will be carried forward with our state election advocacy in 2026.

We continue to demonstrate the collaboration we expect from State and Federal Government so that we can ensure the region not only grows sustainably but thrives.

Thank you all for your hard work and support.

Cr Deirdre Diamante

Chair, Eastern Region Group of Councils
Mayor, Manningham City Council



ERG Leadership group (L-R) - Whitehorse Dep. Mayor, Cr Prue Cutts, Mayor Cr Andrew Davenport, Maroondah Mayor, Cr Kylie Spears (ERG Dep. Chair) Yarra Ranges Mayor, Cr Jim Child, Manningham Mayor, Cr Deirdre Diamante, (ERG Chair), Knox Dep. Mayor, Cr Glen Atwell; Maroondah Dep. Mayor Cr Linda Hancock, Manningham Dep. Mayor Cr Andrew Conlon, Yarra Ranges Dep. Mayor, Cr Richard Higgins, Knox Mayor, Cr Lisa Cooper (absent)

About the ERG

We are a collaboration between five Councils in Melbourne's east: Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

As a catalyst for collaboration through advocacy, integrated planning and shared services we build strong relationships across member councils and with stakeholders to amplify our efforts and deliver better outcomes of benefit to the region's communities.

Our region

The region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and extends from 15km from Melbourne's CBD, eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It includes well-treed suburbs and urban centres, such as Doncaster, Box Hill, Wantirna and Ringwood, and many townships including Warrandyte, Yarra Junction and Olinda.

The Region is large in the context of the wider Melbourne metropolitan area. Together, ERG Councils host around 750,000 residents and some 300,000 jobs - an urban area equivalent to almost two Canberra's and some 30 per cent of metropolitan Melbourne. The region's population was estimated at 758 016 in 2024¹.

The region's economy is significant, containing 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and over \$49 billion Gross Regional Product (GRP). The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance; retail trade; education & training; manufacturing; and construction.

Our vision

Our vision is for the region to be connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous, supported by financially secure, high performing councils. To achieve this, we focus on four strategic pillars:



Our priorities:

In 2024/25 we identified five strategic priorities that are our focus for working together over the next four years. They are:

1. Build shared services and increase joint procurement
2. Enhance regional infrastructure initiative
3. Transform movement in the east
4. Support community safety
5. Develop local employment

¹ ABS 2024 Estimated Residential Population

Achievements in 2024/25

2024/25 saw the approval of the next 4-year ERG Strategic Plan 2025-29.

The ERG Strategic Plan supports the good governance of the ERG, with 18 actions informing our annual workplan. The focus for the final year of the 2021-25 Plan was the 2024 council elections and new ERG leadership group, new Council Plans and the development of the new ERG Strategic Plan.

Implementation highlights include:

- **Strong advocacy** to the State Government regarding the *Housing Statement, Plan for Victoria*, and a series of planning reforms to the Victoria Planning Provisions and Planning Schemes. A Regional Planning Navigator was prepared to assist community understanding of the reforms and to frame advocacy efforts. The Federal Election provided the opportunity to articulate and present eastern region priorities to the Commonwealth Government. Other advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils, regional infrastructure needs and social and affordable housing.
- We inducted a **new ERG membership** following the 2024 council elections. This included governance processes such as the election of the Chair and Deputy Chair.
- We developed a new **Strategic Plan for 2025-2029**, consulting widely with member councils and partners. For the first time, this also involved a Council Plan working group resulting in member councils referencing the Plan in their Council Plans and committing to collaborative efforts with the ERG.
- We continue to support the Eastern Region Procurement Network (ERPN) to **accelerate joint procurement** as a first step toward shared services. This has involved developing a Regional Procurement Policy Framework, data analysis and the preparation of a Regional Roadmap. Opportunities are now being realised as part of a regional pipeline and through early market engagement.
- Ongoing operational support to deliver bi-monthly ERG and CEO meetings, as well as direct project delivery and regular **communication** to members.
- Productive relationships with key stakeholders through our website, social media (LinkedIn page) and e-newsletter and meeting regularly with Council Communications teams.



Responding to planning policy & reform

Major changes to planning strategies, policies, planning provisions and processes occurred during 2024/25 in response to the *Victorian Housing Statement* and *Plan for Victoria*, all of which will have impact on the scale and location of development, and on how decisions are made.

The State introduced a housing capacity target for each council and the region and nominated specific centres for accelerated growth.

Building on the SGS Economics & Planning advice to the ERG, [Plan East](#), about what infrastructure investment, risk mitigation, and planning policy would be required in response, we identified those issues for continued advocacy throughout the year:

- fund and better coordinate the planning and delivery of major infrastructure
- improve accessibility and productivity by increasing sustainable integrated transport options and reducing car dependency
- protect the character and amenity of the region, including through (blue and green) infrastructure that works with the natural environment
- promote sequenced infill housing development in the region that incorporates activity centres and growth corridors, Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) precincts, and areas for greyfield housing.

The State Government also introduced changes to reduce timeframes for assessing multi-dwelling development applications. The ERG has been very concerned that together, these changes have unintended consequences, exclude people from decision making processes, do not enable community infrastructure to keep pace with growth and undermine the integrity and transparency of the planning system.

We developed a *Regional Planning Navigator* to assist advocacy efforts and help the community to understand the changes.

Fostering effective government relations

To strengthen and build effective partnerships we continue to engage with and provide information to Ministers, local Members of Parliament, and peak bodies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria.

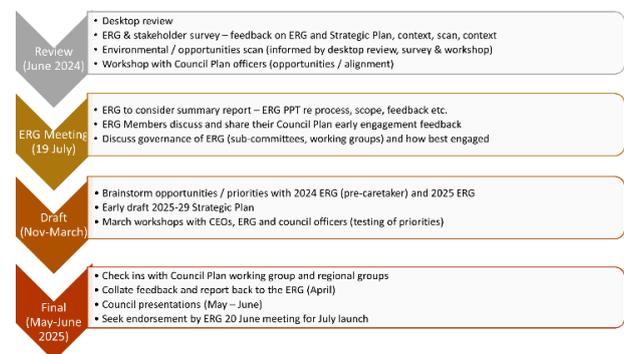
We aim to align our advocacy efforts with other regional groups, such as EAGA, and meet regularly with Communications Managers across the region.

Our election advocacy and representation to various Ministers and local members, included:

- Minister for Planning - ResCode changes
- Minister for Energy - tree canopy / line clearances
- Minister for Environment - contaminated land
- submitted to Plan for Victoria; Upper House Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning Reforms, Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year strategy review
- agreed region-wide transport advocacy priorities

A new strategic plan

The 2025-29 Strategic Plan was prepared on the premise that 'we are a collective of Councils with common interests and we can do more together'. The process for preparing the Plan was extensive and involved the following steps:



The consultation process confirmed our vision for a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region, but recognised the pressures on councils to do this. While the ERG acts as a catalyst for collaboration and as a trusted voice on regionally significant matters, increasingly our focus is to create an enabling operating environment and support councils to be more efficient and effective.

This means we will continue to work closely with the local government sector at both officer and elected representative level and with other regional groups.

The new Strategic Plan will guide our future activities and advocacy with projects and actions identified for each of the five strategic priorities.

Other activity

The ERG continues to support **ERPN Procurement Managers** (including Monash and Boroondara representatives) to meet regularly to pursue joint procurement and improvement opportunities.

Council Plan officers, Governance Managers, MEREDG (Economic Development) and **MERSRS** (Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreational Strategy Group among other officer groups continue to meet regularly.

Financial Position - 30 June 2025

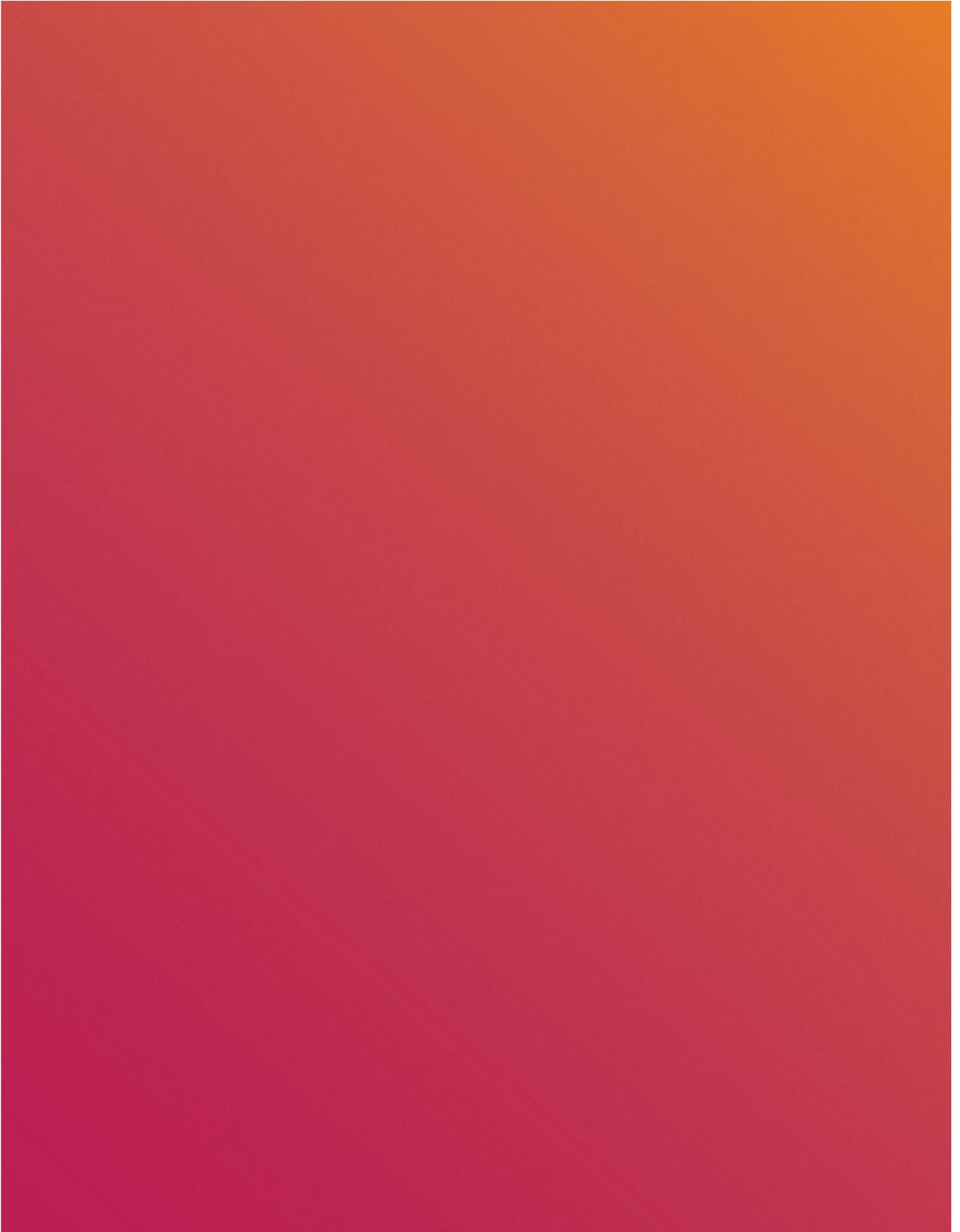
Income	2023/2024 (\$)	2024/2025 (\$)
Annual ERG Council member contributions	175,000	175,000
Carry forward surplus [#]	372,317	235,463
Reimbursement (Monash)		391
Total funds	\$547,317	\$410,854
Expenditure		
Salaries	139,774	133,617
Travel / Phones / Sundries	7,664	1,913
Catering	##	8,686
Consultancies - total, comprising:	164,416	15,760
- Graphic design and website / comms	3,000	4,127
- Regional economic and demographic data	13,200*	0
- Government relations advice	5,000	0
- Health Innovation and Care Economy project	105,316	0
- Plan East	37,900	0
- Other consultancies	##	11,178
- Training / events	##	455
Total expenditure	\$311,854	\$159,975
Surplus - carry fwd (Deficit)	\$235,463	\$250,879

*#incl external project funding. *2024-25 Remplan subscription paid in 2023-24 to obtain a discount. ##not previously itemised*

Members & meeting attendance 2024/25

The ERG comprises the Mayor, Deputy Mayor (or Councillor) and CEO (or their delegate). Membership is renewed annually following Council mayoral elections in November. The Chair and Deputy Chair are elected at the December meeting. The ERG meets at least every two months except during the caretaker period.

Dec 23 - Nov 24 (3 ERG + 7 CEO mtgs)		Dec 24 - June 2025 (5 ERG + 6 CEO mtgs)	
Knox		Knox	
Cr Jude Dwight, Mayor (ERG Chair)	3	Cr Lisa Cooper, Mayor	2
Cr Sorina Grasso, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Glen Atwell, Deputy Mayor	2
Bruce Dobson, CEO	9	Bruce Dobson, CEO	9
Manningham		Manningham	
Cr Carli Lange, Mayor	3	Cr Deirdre Diamante, Mayor (ERG Chair)	5
Cr Laura Mayne, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Andrew Conlon, Deputy Mayor	4
Andrew Day, CEO	9	Andrew Day, CEO	10
Maroondah		Maroondah	
Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	3	Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	5
Cr Paul McDonald, Deputy Mayor	3	Cr Linda Hancock, Deputy Mayor	5
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	9	Steve Kozlowski, CEO	10
Whitehorse		Whitehorse	
Cr Denise Masoud, Mayor	3	Cr Andrew Davenport, Mayor	3
Cr Mark Lane, Former Mayor	3	Cr Prue Cutts, Deputy Mayor	5
Simon McMillan, CEO	9	Simon McMillan, CEO	10
Yarra Ranges		Yarra Ranges	
Cr Sophie Todorov, Mayor	3	Cr Jim Child, Mayor	4
Cr David Eastham, Deputy Mayor	0	Cr Richard Higgins, Deputy Mayor	5
Tammi Rose, CEO	10	Tammi Rose, CEO	10



Attachment 3

The following list of achievements over the previous three financial years has been drawn from the ERG Annual Reports for those years.

2023/24

Eighteen actions formed the basis of ERG's workplan involving integrated planning, shared services, joint procurement and advocacy. Implementation highlights include:

- **Advocacy** was predominantly to the State Government and related to the Housing Statement, amendments to the Victoria Planning Provisions and Planning Schemes, and seeking a more cooperative approach to better support regional priorities and community needs. Other advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils and governance, including library funding, Waste Management Guidelines and the unintended consequences of applying Windfall Gains Tax to council land.
- ERG completed the grant funded **Health Innovation and Care Economy** project in conjunction with the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership. This project recommended opportunities to strengthen the health, innovation and care sectors in the east, developed with comprehensive research and stakeholder input.
- The **Joint Fair Access Policy** was developed involving seven councils. It aims to improve gender equitable access and use of publicly owned community sports infrastructure and support the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032 implementation.
- ERG continues to support the Eastern Region Procurement Network (ERPN) to **accelerate joint procurement**. This has seen an increase in collaboration for the joint tendering of shared services and exploration of opportunities for shared procurement, training/capability building and reporting.
- Regular support to several council officer groups, including in the areas of **reconciliation and gender equality**, to assist and progress opportunities regionally.
- Working with the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (**EAHA**) and the Charter Group of Councils to understand and address the minimum social housing supply needs for the region through submissions, information sharing and projects.
- Liaison with and support to the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (**EAGA**) to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Foster productive relationships with key stakeholders through our website, social media (LinkedIn page) and e-newsletter and meet regularly with council Communications teams.

2022/23

Implementation highlights in the second year of the Strategic Plan included:

- **Advocacy** priorities were targeted towards the need for better collaboration between all levels of government to achieve better outcomes for communities in the east. Meetings were held with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Melissa Horne MP as well as local state and federal Members of Parliament to discuss local challenges and opportunities to work together and contribute to decision making on shared regional priorities.
- Completion of the **Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032**.
- Commencement and completion of Stage 1 of the **Health Innovation and Care Economy** project in conjunction with the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership, following a grant from the State Government's Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund. The project explores opportunities to strengthen this sector in the east and involves comprehensive research and stakeholder engagement.
- Working with the Eastern Region Procurement Network to accelerate **joint procurement** and create a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin regional collaboration. With the support of Procurement Australia and SimPLY, this work has included the analysis of historical procurement data to identify opportunities for collaboration. Regular meetings of Procurement Managers were also supported by the ERG throughout the year.
- Regular support to several council officer groups, including the areas of **reconciliation and gender equality**, to assist and progress opportunities regionally.
- Working with EAHA and the Charter Group of Councils to understand and address the minimum **social housing supply needs** for the region, as calculated by Knox City Council for all ERG and Charter Councils.
- Continued to support to **EAGA** to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Regular communication to members and to foster productive relationships with key stakeholders through our website, social media (LinkedIn page) and quarterly e-newsletter.

2021/22

First year of the Strategic Plan implementation achievements include:

- Delivered the **Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032**.
- Advocacy targeted to the May 2022 **Federal election**. The ERG identified a range of capital works and projects to support our regional communities, grow the regional economy, and sustain our built and natural environment. Media releases, social media

and the ERG website were regularly updated with news and information. ERG councils pursued meetings with local members, and the ERG, with the support of regional groups, met with several Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers to raise the profile of the region and ensure they were aware of ERG priorities.

- Working on the 2022 **State election** advocacy, with a focus on economic development in the region.
- **Reconciliation Advisory Groups and Action Plans** - ERG meets regularly with council officers to provide assistance with progressing activities and opportunities regionally, including the potential to create an online indigenous cultural awareness training module tailored for the region.
- Promoting **trails for tourism, health and movement** in conjunction with the **ETC**, as well as regional road, rail and bus priorities.
- Support to **EAGA** to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.



ERG advocacy platform 2025



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Indigenous acknowledgement

The ERG recognises the Traditional Custodians of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

Region overview

The eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne is growing and changing...

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) comprises five local government authorities of eastern Melbourne - Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. The ERG councils collaborate and partner on shared priorities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services, and joint procurement to benefit the region's communities.

Our vision for a connected, healthy, sustainable, and prosperous region is progressed through a focus on four strategic pillars:

- **Our communities** - improved health, wellbeing, and social cohesion
- **Our environment** - sustainable living and access to nature
- **Our economy** - a connected, competitive, diverse and prosperous region
- **Our infrastructure and buildings** - promote social, economic, and environmental opportunities

The region extends from 15 kilometres to Melbourne's CBD eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It is a major population centre with a significant industry base with specialisations in advanced manufacturing, wholesale /distribution, health services, education (including Universities and TAFE institutes), as well as retail, tourism and other service industries. The region includes the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre, Ringwood Metropolitan Activity Centre and the Bayswater Business Precinct.

Residents enjoy a broad choice of health and recreation facilities, local and regional shopping destinations, and access to leading schools, universities, and other tertiary institutions. The region functions as 'Melbourne's lungs', with extensive green wedge areas, mature canopy trees and is Melbourne's primary water catchment.

The region's economy is significant, containing 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and over \$49.5 billion Gross Regional Product (GRP). The manufacturing sector is of greatest value but not the largest employer. The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance; retail trade; education & training; manufacturing; and construction.



Total population
746,067
 (Approx. 14% of Greater Melbourne's total)



Total land area (hectares)
282,115
 (28% of Greater Melbourne's 999,251 hectares)



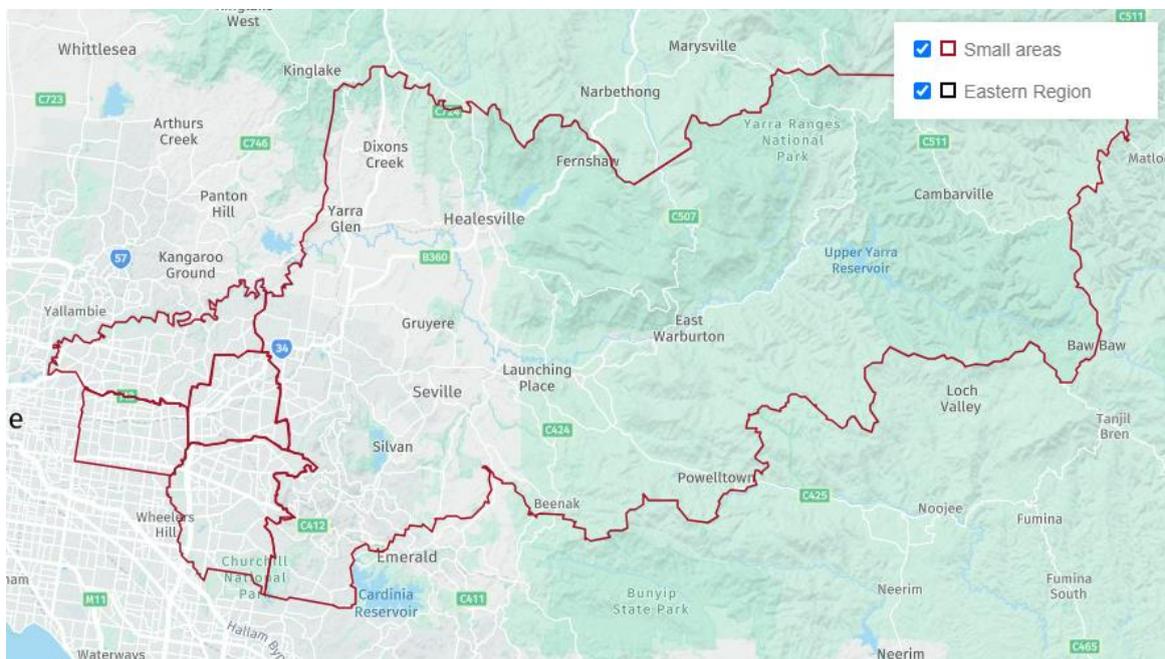
Gross regional product (\$B)
\$49.5
 (Approximately 11% of Greater Melbourne's total)

Summary of asks

The ERG has identified four key themes for advocacy with clear 'asks' from Government. Estimated funding and likely funding source have been provided to assist discussions and decision making.

Outcome	ERG pillar	Ask	Cost to Govt.	Funding source
Address financial sustainability				
Financially sustainable councils	All	The Federal Government increase Financial Assistance Grants to councils to at least one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.	1 per cent of taxation revenue	Federal Government
Support housing growth				
Liveable and growing neighbourhoods	Communities Infrastructure & buildings	The Federal Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commit to a five-year \$1 billion funding program for community infrastructure allow applications without the need for an invitation to apply allow applications for both scoping/business case funding as well as construction funding enable a local government peak body to apply for funding incorporate annual indexation collaborate on a tri-partite infrastructure guideline to assist in evaluating community infrastructure proposals. 	\$1 billion	Federal Government Dedicated community infrastructure Fund - to be established
	Communities Environment	The Federal Government commit to collaborate with the ERG and co-fund the Eastern Region Open Space Strategy, Implementation Plan and priority actions.	Co-contribution Study: \$150,000 Implementation: \$25 million	ERG councils Federal Government
Safer communities	Communities	The Federal Government commit to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collaborate with the ERG and State Government on safety around public transport interchanges continue to fund crime prevention initiatives. 	No cost	NA
Build climate resilience				
Accelerated climate adaptation	Environment	The Federal Government establish a multilevel governance model involving all three levels of government to coordinate and address the fragmented approach to climate policy, funding, and resourcing.	No cost	NA
Reduced flood risk	Communities Environment Infrastructure & buildings	The Federal Government partner with the ERG and relevant agencies and research partners, to improve flood infrastructure planning, prioritisation, and delivery for regional water outcomes at the sub-catchment level.	\$1 billion over 10 years	ERG councils Federal Government
Improved health and increased biodiversity	Communities Environment	The Federal Government fund the development of a 10-year Greening the East implementation plan and contribute to the cost of revegetation for five years.	Co-contribution Study: \$125,000 Implementation: \$15 million	ERG councils Federal Government

More resilient council assets	Infrastructure & buildings Economy Environment	The Federal Government fund the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action to extend the Adaptive Community Assets project to buildings, drainage, and natural assets.	Co-contribution \$350,000	EAGA councils
Transform movement in the east				
Stronger local economy	Communities Economy	The Federal Government jointly fund a regional initiative to educate businesses and promote employment through social enterprises (as a pathway to private-sector employment) to reduce the economic challenge faced by women and primary carers in the eastern region.	Co-contribution \$250,000	ERG councils Federal Government
Better access to jobs and services	Communities Economy Infrastructure & buildings	The Federal Government commit to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jointly fund the State Government and ERG to prepare a publicly available Integrated Transport Plan for the eastern metropolitan region with identified funding priorities Create an active transport funding stream so that active transport initiatives do not have to compete with sport and recreation facilities Fund a rapid bus pilot along the Suburban Rail Loop route 	\$10 million	ERG councils State Government Federal Government
Improved freight movement	Economy Infrastructure & buildings	The Federal Government co-fund a \$300 million program with ERG councils to seal a further 300 kilometres of unsealed roads to improve access to agribusiness and increase productivity.	\$300 million	ERG councils Federal Government



Compiled and presented in profile.id by [.id](#) (informed decisions).

Financial sustainability

The financial sustainability of all councils in Australia is under increasing threat from:

- an increasing population and associated infrastructure and service needs
- rate capping - despite significant cost increases arising from inflation
- cost shifting from both Federal and State Government - for example for kindergarten funding.

Financial Assistance Grants provide councils with funding certainty enabling them to plan and respond to local needs. Councils are providing a very wide range of free and low-cost facilities, services, events, and programs essential to community cohesion, wellbeing, and safety.

Over time, the amount provided to councils has been reduced from one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue to around 0.55 per cent. A substantial increase to Financial Assistance Grants to councils would support local government to continue to provide support for communities struggling during the cost-of-living crisis.

The ERG has explored measures such as shared services and joint procurement in an effort to reduce costs. Despite these measures, and given the extent of cost increases, it is inevitable that local government will need to cut services and reduce capital expenditure to remain solvent unless further assistance can be provided by the Federal Government.

Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) advocacy is seeking Financial Assistance Grants to be restored to at least one per cent (ideally two per cent) of Commonwealth taxation revenues. The ALGA has also asked for an additional one-off payment of \$3 billion to address the practice of bringing forward payments.

The ERG supports this request from the ALGA towards a financially sustainable local government sector.

Ask:

The Federal Government increase Financial Assistance Grants to councils to at least one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

Support housing growth

Infrastructure needs

Increased provision of housing to meet population growth is a critical focus for both the Federal Government’s *National Housing Accord*¹ and the State Government’s *Victoria’s Housing Statement*.²

Recent draft targets set by the State Government suggest that ERG Councils will need to provide for an additional 202,000 dwellings by 2050, an increase of 79 per cent on existing dwelling stock. This has significant implications on community infrastructure that will either need to be newly provided or upgraded to meet future demand.

For the Eastern Region, data comparison³ undertaken by the ERG shows that the targets are 35 per cent higher than current trend and planned growth.

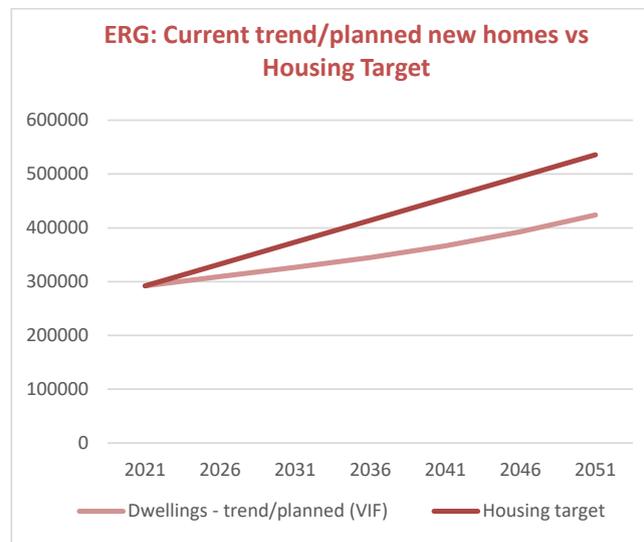


Figure 1: Victoria in Future projections versus the draft Victorian housing targets.

Number of homes	2023 - Existing homes	Draft Target	2051 - Total homes	% growth rate (homes)	% growth rate (population)
Knox	63,100	47,000	110,100	74%	
Manningham	51,000	39,000	90,000	76%	
Maroondah	48,000	44,000	92,000	92%	
Whitehorse	74,000	79,000	153,000	107%	
Yarra Ranges (Green Wedge)	62,700	28,000	90,700	45%	
Total ERG	298,800	237,000	535,800	79%	
Total Metro Melbourne	2,134,200	2,001,000	4,135,200	94%	63%

Table 1: Victoria’s draft housing targets

The Federal Government’s *draft National Urban Policy*⁴ has two goals relevant to housing growth and commensurate infrastructure needs. The first of these is liveability:

¹ *National Housing Accord*, Australian Government, 2022

² *Victoria’s Housing Statement*, Victorian Government, 2024

³ *Housing Targets and Impacts on the East*, Eastern Region Group of Councils, July 2024

⁴ *National Urban Policy - Consultation Draft*, Australian Government, May 2024



Where people can live in a place of their choosing, within their means, suitable to their needs. This is a safe, well designed, well-built city that promotes active, independent living, quality of life and connections within the community.

Factors directly within the control of local government that can determine liveability and quality of life include:

- access to green and open space
- opportunities for recreation, arts, sport, cultural connection, and social interaction
- safety
- connectivity to community places and employment centres

It is these elements that are in danger of being forgotten in the push for faster housing provision. If new housing is not well designed and situated, its liveability will be compromised. It may also impact on the liveability of surrounding residents as facilities and services are stretched to meet demand. Loss of canopy trees on private land will accelerate urban heating. Purposeful placemaking and timely provision of community infrastructure is required to achieve wellbeing and build social cohesion.

The second relevant goal in the *draft National Urban Policy* is equity:



Where everyone has fair access to resources, opportunities and amenities, no matter where they live or their socio-economic status.

Factors influencing equity include:

- access to jobs, services, education opportunities, transport, and digital and social infrastructure
- the provision of affordable housing, social housing, and homelessness services
- provision and access to targeted services, responsive to groups who need them, including women, young people, and First Nations communities.

Local government provide many of the support services targeted to these factors. These services are already under strain and delays in establishing additional services are likely.

National urban planning policy will fall short of achieving its objectives without real action 'on the ground' and an on-going funding commitment. While traditionally there have been a number of funding streams, future funding for local community infrastructure and support services, such as open space, recreation and cultural facilities is uncertain.

The *Housing Support Program* and the *Priority Community Infrastructure Program (PCIP)* have been of great assistance. to local government seeking to achieve shared goals such as detailed in the *draft National Urban Policy*, however it is understood that uncommitted funding in the PCIP was removed as part of the 2024/2025 federal budget. Additionally, there are times when it is unclear why one project has been favoured over another and further clarity around prioritisation is sought.

Ask: The Federal Government:

- **commit to a five-year funding program (1 billion) for community infrastructure**
- **allow applications without the need for an invitation to apply**
- **allow applications for both scoping/business case funding as well as construction funding**
- **enable a local government peak body to apply for funding**
- **incorporate annual indexation**
- **collaborate on a tri-partite infrastructure guideline to assist in evaluating community infrastructure proposals.**

Regional open space, sport and recreation priorities

The ERG is conscious of the growing demand for open space and recreation facilities and the fair distribution of those facilities across the region. Interconnected open spaces benefit communities, enhance biodiversity, and create urban forest opportunities.

An additional 1,500 hectares of open space is estimated to be required over 30 years.⁵ The *Victorian Housing Statement* foreshadowed dwelling growth at rate faster than population growth, as households become smaller and the nature of housing ownership changes which will reduce private open space available to some dwellings and increase pressure on public open space. Despite these plans for rapid growth no additional parks, other open space, nor additional infrastructure has been identified.

To address these issues a Regional Open Space Strategy is required. This will update the ERG *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*⁶ to respond to State growth targets and include open space. This forms part of the ERG's Strategic Plan for 2025-29. The Strategy will be broad in scope and seek to:

- Improve connections between open spaces across the region
- Improve tree cover, particularly along active transport routes
- Improve biodiversity, ecosystem services and mitigate risk
- Ensure recreation facilities are provided and upgraded to meet existing and forecast demand
- Ensure a fair distribution of recreation facilities across the region
- Provide business case justification for key facilities and expanded open space.

As the Federal Government often provides funding for the construction of local government open space and recreational facilities it is critical that both the Federal Government and the ERG maximise the outcomes achieved and direct funding to where it will have the greatest impact. A collaborative effort between the ERG and the Federal Government would act as a model for other regions across Australia.

Ask:

The Federal Government commit to collaborate with the ERG and co-fund the Eastern Region Open Space Strategy, Implementation Plan, and fund priority actions.

Community safety

The ERG is increasingly concerned about community safety. Crime statistics⁷ indicate double digit growth in crime rates for most ERG councils.

The draft *National Urban Policy* highlights several areas relevant to community safety and that our 'urban areas are safe' when there is:

- Inclusivity and safety in public spaces
- Safety for marginalised groups
- Crime prevention; and
- Safety in movement

Local Government cannot address these areas alone. Cooperation of both Federal and State Governments is essential. Placemaking can help to discourage crime in public spaces through measures such as adequate lighting and passive surveillance, access, movement, and sightlines.

⁵ *Plan East: A proposition for sustainable growth*, Eastern Region Group of Councils & SGS Economics and Planning 2024

⁶ *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*, Eastern Region Group of Councils, 2022

⁷ Latest Crime Data by Area, Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, 2024

Creating safe places must be an essential component to the fast rollout of new housing and must be 'built in' rather than left behind.

The ERG would prioritise collaboration with Federal and State Governments around transport interchange safety (including bus stops) and for the continuation of grants such as the *Creating Safer Places* and the *Empowering Communities* Grants.

Ask:

The Federal Government commit to:

- ***collaborate with the ERG and State Government on safety around public transport interchanges***
- ***continue to fund crime prevention initiatives.***

Build climate resilience

Working together

Currently the approach to climate policy, funding and resourcing is fragmented.

The key extreme risks for the Eastern Region documented in a regional risk assessment⁸ are:

- Service delivery failure in extreme weather
- Increased demand on council facilities during heatwaves
- Inadequate building design
- Strategic failure to plan for climate change
- Bushfire damage to assets
- Increased flood damage
- Reduced asset lifespan.

Currently, the annual cost of damage due to climate events is high, and this is expected to double within a generation.⁹

Council	Average annual damage (\$000)			% change in AAD from present day	
	Present day	Nearer future (~2050)	More distant future (~2100)	Nearer future (~2050)	More distant future (~2100)
Knox	2,439	6,790	9,958	178%	308%
Manningham	1,998	6,003	8,682	200%	334%
Maroondah	962	3,006	4,327	212%	350%
Whitehorse	1,234	3,795	5,475	208%	344%
Yarra Ranges	2,459	7,340	10,620	199%	332%
TOTAL for ERG	9,092	26,934	39,062	200%	334%

Table 2: Summary of existing and forecast annual damage for the Eastern Region.

The draft *National Urban Policy* recognises the importance of working together to build climate resilience and that cooperation of all levels of government, along with industry and the community is required.



Where governments, industry and community work together to appropriately plan for urban growth, reduce emissions, promote a circular economy and adapt to climate change to ensure that our urban areas meet the needs of diverse communities and that our natural environments are rehabilitated for future generations.

Ask:

The Federal Government establish a multi-level governance model involving all three levels of government to coordinate and address the fragmented approach to climate policy, funding, and resourcing.

⁸ *Adapting to Climate Change in Melbourne's East - A Regional Risk Assessment*, Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership and the Victorian Government, 2013

⁹ *Adaptive Community Assets (Phase 2): Quantifying the economic costs of impacts*, Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, 2023

Flood mapping

Stormwater flooding is prevalent in urban areas of the Yarra River and Dandenong Creek catchments across the Eastern Region.

While overall annual rainfall will reduce due to climate change, the region is predicted to see more frequent and intense rainfall events that will increase the risk of flooding.¹⁰ Flooding is exacerbated by an increase in impervious surfaces and associated stormwater flows unless this risk is properly managed.

The ERG councils are working with Melbourne Water to improve flood mapping across local government areas. However, there is a low level of confidence that appropriate infrastructure measures will be planned, prioritised, and implemented to address known and projected climate change risks in a timely manner.

Ask:

The Federal Government partner with the ERG and relevant agencies and research partners, to improve flood infrastructure planning, prioritisation, and delivery for regional water outcomes at the sub-catchment level.

Greening

In 2018, the Eastern Region had around 26 per cent urban tree cover, almost double the metropolitan average of 15.3 per cent.¹¹ The region accounted for 40 per cent of Melbourne's overall urban tree canopy coverage, with tree canopy varying across the region. Most urban tree canopy is on residential land, parkland and linear infrastructure such as streets.

Between 2014 and 2018 the Eastern Metro Region lost more tree canopy than any metropolitan region.¹² Maroondah and Whitehorse had the highest average loss of tree canopy of all metropolitan local government areas. All Councils in the Eastern Region have adopted the *Living Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy* that specifies targets of 30 per cent total tree canopy and 50 per cent total tree and shrubs canopy by 2050.¹³

The *Priority Urban Greening Analysis 2023* undertaken as part of the Living Melbourne work describes the factors influencing loss of canopy cover:

*'The large-scale expansion and intensification of urban development to accommodate the future population is driving the loss of trees, shrubs, and grasses (collectively, the urban forest). As the urban forest declines, the critical habitat for native fauna and the myriad of other benefits the urban forest provides are lost. At the same time, climate change and changing urban land use means the city is getting hotter, with more frequent, longer and more severe heatwaves impacting human health, productivity, and our way of life. Urban greening is one of the most effective ways to mitigate climate change impacts in cities.'*¹⁴

Investment targeted to reverse the decline in urban greening and address the growing challenges of excessive heat and habitat loss is required. The ERG would like to build on this analysis further to identify the region's priority areas, the cost to revegetate detailed in a 10-year 'Greening the East' implementation plan and co-fund revegetation for five years.

Ask:

The Federal Government fund the development of a 10-year Greening the East implementation plan and contribute to the cost of revegetation for five years.

¹⁰ *Draft Eastern Metro Land Use Framework Plan*, Eastern Metropolitan Partnership and the Victorian Government, 2017

¹¹ *Melbourne Vegetation Cover 2018 - Eastern Region*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2019

¹² *Vegetation Cover Change in Melbourne 2014 - 2018*, Hurley, J., Saunders, A., Both, A., Sun, C., Boruff, B., Duncan, J., Amati, M., Caccetta, P. and Chia, J. (2019) Urban Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia 2019

¹³ *Living Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy*, The Nature Conservancy and Resilient Melbourne, 2019

¹⁴ *Priority Urban Greening Analysis*, Living Melbourne, 2023

Adaptive Community Assets

The ERG supports the work of the Victorian Climate Change Alliances who co-operatively are quantifying the costs and benefits of climate change adaptation options for local government owned assets. This work includes:

- thorough assessment of economic impacts
- to identify and scope adaptation options for assets
- assessment of costs and benefits of options
- prioritisation of hazard responses
- development of a scaleable risk mapping tool.

The Alliances have self-funded part of the project to address council roads as a priority. They now wish to include buildings, drainage and natural assets however there is a shortfall of funding to undertake that work.

The ERG also supports the Australian Local Government Association's call for a \$200 million climate change fund to implement local adaptation actions to limit disruption to communities and local services. If established, this fund could be utilised to support the Alliances priorities.

Ask:

The Federal Government fund the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA) \$350,000 to extend the Adaptive Community Assets project to buildings, drainage, and natural assets.

Transform movement in the east

Working closer to home

Despite strong levels of employment self-containment, access to jobs in the Eastern Region is primarily by car.

With 53.1 per cent of the Eastern Region's resident workers employed locally¹⁵, and over 85,000 Small-Medium Employers (SMEs)¹⁶ there is significant opportunity to transform movement in Melbourne's east through initiatives to grow local employment and increase the number of jobs readily accessible by public and active transport.

The Federal Government's North East Local Jobs Plan¹⁷ recognises the challenges of:

- limited transport options for those living outside of main transport hubs, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas with dispersed populations. This is even more difficult for individuals looking to travel north-south and east-west across the outer suburbs
- employment for people with a disability, women over 45, or who are primary carers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, disengaged youth and First Nations people
- expansion of recruitment pathways beyond traditional options by small and medium businesses
- fragmented awareness of the range of skills, training, and employment support pathways available.

Ask:

The Federal Government jointly fund a regional initiative to educate businesses and promote employment through social enterprises (as a pathway to private-sector employment) to reduce the economic challenge faced by women and primary carers in the eastern region.

Movement of people

The Eastern Region comprises a highly car dependent population, with 79 per cent of trips made by cars and most households (59 per cent) having two or more vehicles. Only 7.3 per cent of trips are made by public transport¹⁸. Towards the inner western part of the region, access to public transport is reasonably good with both rail and bus connections. However, in the eastern part of the region public transport access is poor and only readily available to those along the rail corridor.

The Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) project could provide tangible benefits for communities. Done well, it will improve connections between major employment and retail precincts and provide quicker, more reliable travel for many within the region. It is understood that an acceptable business case is yet to be provided to the Federal Government. To establish an acceptable business case, the ERG makes three suggestions:

- trial a rapid bus along the SRL route to demonstrate the direct benefits of the route and embed transport behaviour change
- recommend changes to bus routes connecting to the SRL route to achieve the widest possible benefit
- provide clarity about social and community infrastructure delivery, including social housing and ongoing local employment as part of the project deliverables.

Infrastructure Victoria research¹⁹ found that buses present a huge opportunity for Melbourne as the most cost-efficient public transport system. The weaknesses and opportunities in the bus network in the Eastern Region are documented by

¹⁵ *Melbourne Functional Economic Region*, Infrastructure Victoria, 2019

¹⁶ Number of small-medium employers by local area, REMPLAN

¹⁷ *North-east Local Jobs Plan*, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Australian Government, 2024 (modified)

¹⁸ *Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity (VISTA)*, Department of Transport and Planning Victorian Government, 2020

¹⁹ *Get on Board: making the most of Melbourne's buses*, Infrastructure Victoria, 2024

the ERG Councils in partnership with the Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)²⁰. The ETC suggests priority bus lane, route extensions, and increased frequency among other interventions to optimise the region's bus network.

Priority projects to improve access to jobs and services are listed in Appendix 1.

Within the region there is significant opportunity to reduce the number of short trips made by car. About 12 per cent of trips are made by walking and a very small percentage of trips (0.75 per cent) are made by bicycle.²¹ Safe and attractive walking and cycling routes (including for e-bikes to counter distance and topography) to and within Activity Centres is a key objective of the ERG councils.²²

Priority projects for active transport can be found in Appendix 1.

A reduction in through traffic in the region will improve safety, reduce road congestion, and enabling freight and employment outcomes. There is significant movement of people from outside the region toward the Melbourne CBD as well as movement of people within the region to employment centres. High-capacity public transport is required to reduce car trips and improve the public transport experience.

The ETC has identified projects²³ in Appendix 1 to assist to meet this objective.

Ask:

The Federal Government commit to:

- ***Jointly fund the State Government and ERG to prepare a publicly available Integrated Transport Plan for the eastern metropolitan region with identified funding priorities***
- ***Create an active transport funding stream so that active transport initiatives do not have to compete with sport and recreation facilities***
- ***Fund a rapid bus pilot along the Suburban Rail Loop route***

Movement of goods

Key road freight routes within the Eastern Region are limited, primarily being freeways linking to Dandenong, Port of Hastings and Port of Melbourne. The North East Link will better link the region to Melbourne Airport and the Hume corridor. However, freight challenges still exist in the form of congestion to main routes and the quality of access to agribusiness. The 'last mile' access for agribusinesses is inhibited by unsealed roads which damage produce and contaminate crops.²⁴ The economic output for agribusiness alone represents \$1,300 million each year.²⁵

The Federal Government previously assisted local government seal roads under the *Roads for the Community* initiative. Yarra Ranges Council was able to seal 180 kilometres of road over nine years through this program.²⁶

A similar commitment is sought to design and construct 300 kilometres of sealed roads and reach key local producers.

Ask:

The Federal Government co-fund a \$300 Million program with ERG councils to seal a further 300 kilometres of unsealed roads to improve access to agribusiness and increase productivity.

²⁰ *Better Transport for Melbourne's East*, Eastern Transport Coalition, 2022

²¹ *Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity (VISTA)*, Department of Transport and Planning Victorian Government, 2020

²² *Eastern Regional Trails Strategy*, Eastern Region Group of Councils, 2018

²³ *Better Transport for Melbourne's East*, Eastern Transport Coalition, 2022

²⁴ *Advocacy Agenda 2022*, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2022

²⁵ Value of industry, REMPLAN (ABS 2024 data release 1)

²⁶ *Advocacy Agenda 2022*, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2022

Appendix 1 - Priority transport projects

Priority projects to improve access to jobs and services:

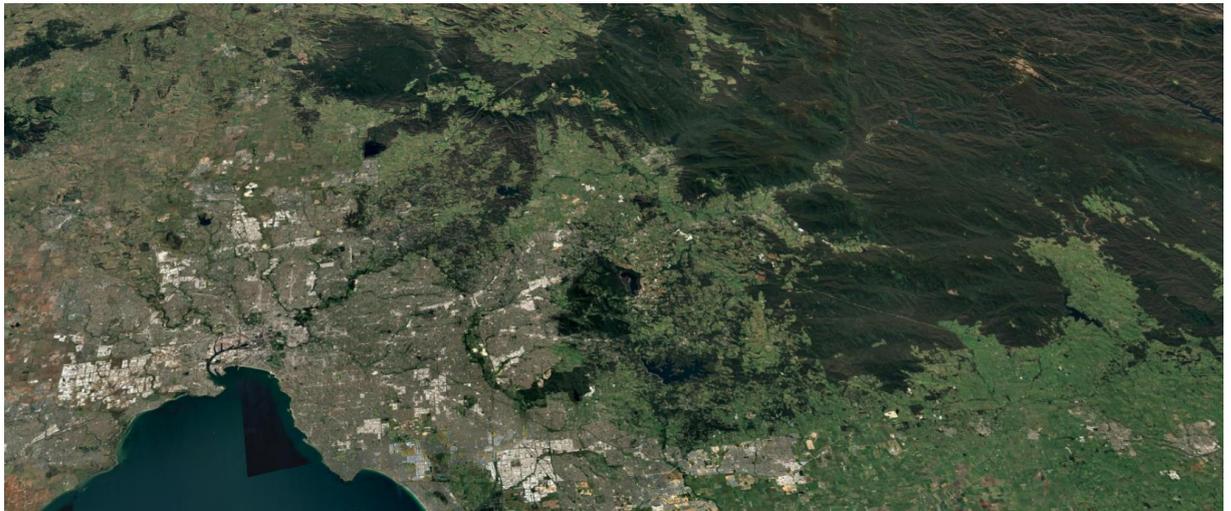
- Upgrade the Doncaster Road bus corridor between Mitcham Station and the Eastern Freeway entrance
- Bus priority measures along Mt Dandenong Road, Canterbury Road and Wantirna Road
- Upgrade the Box Hill transit interchange
- New premium bus route Manningham - Templestowe Road
- New routes along the Canterbury Road corridor, the Maroondah - Ringwood circuit, and from Stud Park, Rowville to Bayswater Station
- On demand services

Priority active transport projects:

- Box Hill Rail Trail - connecting Mont Albert and Box Hill
- Ringwood to Croydon Rail Trail - filling 6.5 kilometres of missing pathways
- Main Yarra Trail - connecting the trail to the Warrandyte Township

Priority projects to reduce through traffic, improve safety and enable freight and employment:

- Caulfield to Rowville high-capacity rapid transit to access the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster
- Duplicate the Lilydale Rail Line from Mooroolbark Station to Lilydale to increase the number of services and improve performance
- Extend Route 75 tram along Burwood and Mountain Highways



Contact

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Liz Johnstone

Executive Officer

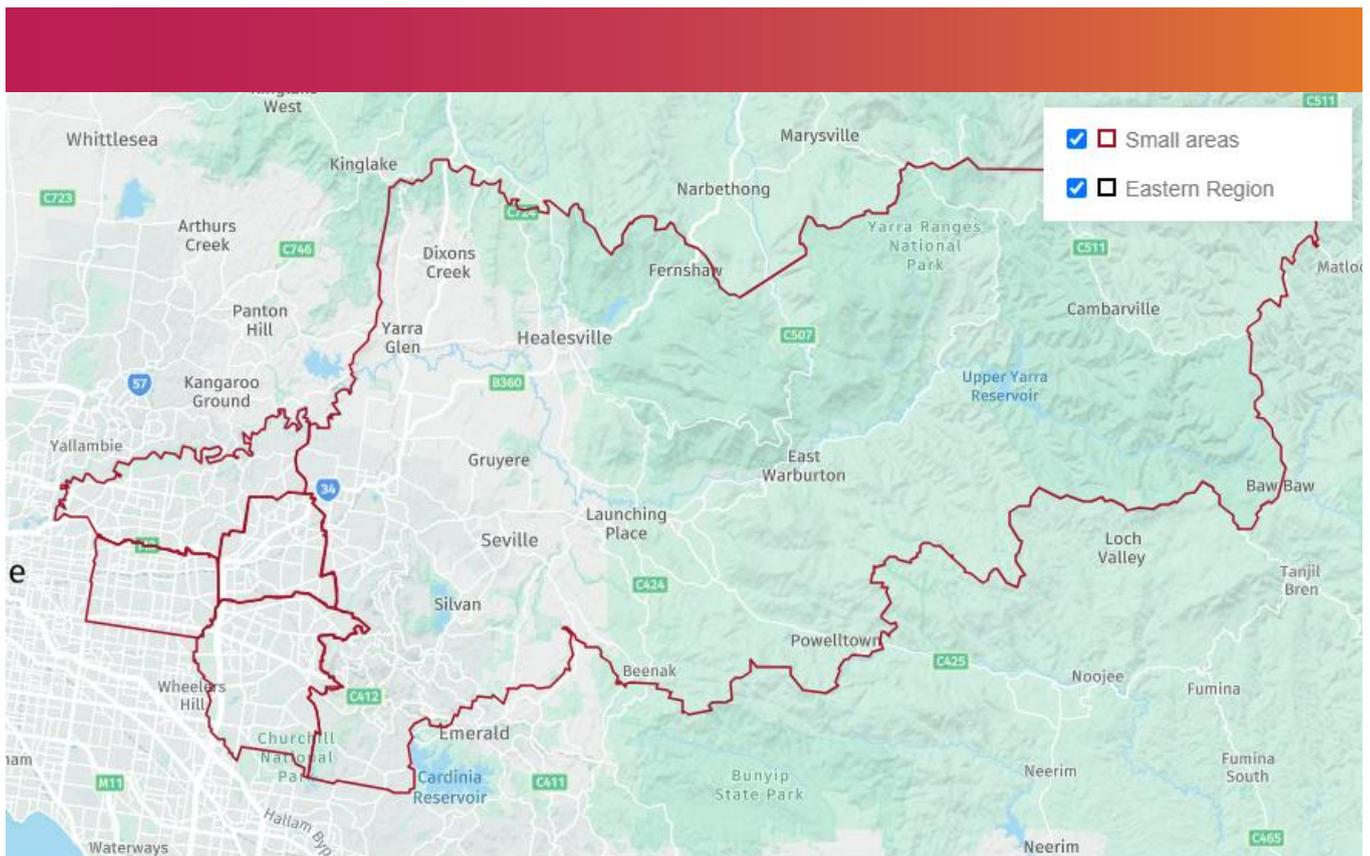
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ERG State Advocacy Platform 2025

Stronger partnerships - better communities



Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).



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Indigenous acknowledgement

The ERG recognises the Traditional Custodians of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

Region overview

The eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne is growing and changing...

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) comprises five local government authorities of eastern Melbourne - Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. The ERG Councils collaborate and partner on shared priorities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services, and joint procurement to benefit the region's communities.

The region extends from 15 kilometres to Melbourne's CBD eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It is a major population base with a significant industry base with specialisations in advanced manufacturing, wholesale /distribution, health services, education (including Universities and TAFE institutes), as well as retail, tourism and other service industries. The region includes the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre, Ringwood Metropolitan Activity Centre and the Bayswater Business Precinct.



Total population
746,067

(Approx. 14% of Greater Melbourne)



Total land area (hectares)
282,115

(28% of Greater Melbourne's 999,251 hectares)



Gross regional product (\$B)
\$49.5

(Approximately 11% of Greater Melbourne)

Residents enjoy a broad choice of health and recreation facilities, local and regional shopping destinations, and access to leading schools, universities, and other tertiary institutions. The region functions as 'Melbourne's lungs', with extensive green wedge areas, mature canopy trees and is Melbourne's primary water catchment.

The region's economy is significant, containing 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and over \$49.5 billion Gross Regional Product (GRP). The manufacturing sector is of greatest value but not the largest employer. The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance; retail trade; education & training; manufacturing; and construction.

Our vision

Our vision is for a '**connected, healthy, sustainable, and prosperous region supported by financially secure, high performing councils**'. The vision is progressed through a focus on four pillars:

- **Our communities** - improved health, wellbeing, and social cohesion
- **Our environment** - sustainable living and access to nature
- **Our economy** - a connected, competitive, diverse and prosperous region
- **Our infrastructure and buildings** - promote social, economic, and environmental opportunities

Our advocacy platform aligns with the strategic priorities for 2025-2029:

- Build shared services and increase joint procurement
- Enhance regional infrastructure
- Transform movement in the East
- Support community safety
- Develop local employment

Summary of asks

The ERG has identified clear 'asks' across six themes for the State Government that support the ERG pillars of: People, Place, Economy and Environment. Estimated funding and likely funding sources are provided to assist discussions and decision making.

Outcome & Ask of the State Government	Cost to Government	Funding source
1. Financially sustainable councils		
<p>ERG councils can fund and support local needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reinstating 50/50 funding for State/local services (such as libraries and school crossing supervisors) in line with the outcomes of the National Inquiry into local government financial sustainability supporting local government calls for Federal Financial Assistance Grants to increase to at least one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue. <p>ERG councils can increase their investment in local community infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> incentivising community infrastructure investment through exempting Councils from Windfall Gains Tax investing developer contributions and 'value capture' in the Council area where the funds are raised. 	<p>Minimal cost</p> <p>1 per cent of federal taxation revenue</p> <p>No cost</p> <p>No cost</p>	<p>State Govt.</p> <p>Federal Gov.</p> <p>State revenue foregone</p> <p>Locally raised funds</p>
2. Transparent and trusted decision making for liveable neighbourhoods		
<p>Communities and councils trust a 'fit for purpose', efficient land use planning system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthening community involvement in planning and applying the principle of subsidiarity to ensure local communities have input to land use decisions that impact them ensuring a genuine 'seat at the table' for local government to deliver the next generation Victorian planning system (P&E Act review) resourcing prompt decision making and scheme amendments at both State and local level committing to a future State/Local government joint review of the efficacy of the planning reforms taking the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions into account regarding third-party rights and use of local schedules. 	<p>No cost</p> <p>No cost</p> <p>No cost after initial investment</p> <p>\$250k</p>	<p>NA</p> <p>NA</p> <p>State Gov.</p> <p>State Gov.</p>
<p>Council services and infrastructure can keep pace with housing growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishing a local liveability fund, as a partnership between state and local government for critical community liveability infrastructure to support State housing targets supporting ERG calls for the Federal Government to establish a five-year \$1 billion open and indexed funding program for planning and building community infrastructure. 	<p>\$1 billion</p> <p>\$1 billion</p>	<p>State Gov. and matching local funds</p> <p>Federal Gov.</p>
<p>The region's growing tree canopy improves liveability, biodiversity and health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-funding a Regional Open Space Connectivity and Greening Strategy with Implementation Plan funding a 10 year implementation grants program to contribute to the cost of revegetation developing and implementing tools /planning mechanism to protect and increase tree canopy cover (minimum 30 per cent), re-greening and climate resilience. 	<p>Study: \$125k</p> <p>Delivery: \$5M</p> <p>No cost (initial investment)</p>	<p>ERG councils & State Gov.</p>

Outcome & Ask of the State Government	Cost to Government	Funding source
3. Safer communities		
<p>Increased awareness, cooperation and an evidence base to improve community safety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead a collaboration with VicPol, ERG councils and Community Safety organisations to leverage crime prevention data and community knowledge to focus on areas with the greatest potential impact (such as public transport and high activity areas) • fund community safety and crime prevention activities and pilot programs to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ engage youth in crime prevention (pilot) ○ support local groups to foster community cohesion (small grants) ○ 'Shine a light on safety' - improve lighting in identified hot spots ○ deliver Cyber scam awareness programs for older adults through Councils and NFPs 	<p>\$100k per annum (est)</p> <p>\$500k per annum (est)</p>	<p>State Gov.</p> <p>ERG councils & State Gov.</p>
4. Build climate resilience		
<p>A stronger role for Melbourne Water ensures flood risk across the region is known and communicated through planning schemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partner with the ERG Councils and relevant agencies and research partners, to improve flood infrastructure planning, prioritisation, funding and delivery at the sub-catchment level and reduce cost of damage regionally. 	<p>\$1 billion over 10 years</p>	<p>ERG councils & State Gov.</p>
<p>ERG Council assets and communities are more resilient to future climate events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA) to extend the Adaptive Community Assets project to council buildings, drainage, and natural assets • support advocacy for a \$400M per annum Federal Adaptation fund (for councils to prepare communities) and \$5 billion per annum for 10 years (to invest in energy upgrades). 	<p>\$350k</p> <p>No cost</p>	<p>State Gov. and EAGA councils</p> <p>Federal Gov.</p>
<p>Climate resilience is accelerated and more effective for regional communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocate for an all levels of government governance model to coordinate and address the fragmented approach to climate policy, funding and resourcing as requested by the Greenhouse Alliances (including EAGA). 	<p>No cost</p>	<p>All levels of govt.</p>
5. Transform movement in the East		
<p>ERG residents enjoy better access to local jobs and services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund a regional Integrated Transport Plan to address gaps and link major transport nodes and deliver identified priorities across all modes • create an active transport funding stream to connect bike paths and trails so that active transport initiatives do not have to compete with sport and recreation facilities • fund a rapid bus pilot along the Suburban Rail Loop route. 	<p>Plan: \$120k</p> <p>Delivery \$100M (\$1 billion over 10 years)</p> <p>\$500k</p>	<p>All levels of govt.</p> <p>State Gov.</p>
<p>Agriculture is supported by an expanded sealed road network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund a program to seal 300 kilometres of unsealed roads to improve access for agribusiness and increase productivity in the eastern region. 	<p>\$15 million</p>	<p>ERG councils & State Gov.</p>
6. Growing out local economy		
<p>Creative industries in the region are stronger and people can work closer to home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund a regional initiative to promote employment in the creative industries, leverage the region's arts and cultural facilities, and strengthen pathways for local artists. 	<p>\$250k</p>	<p>ERG councils & State Gov.</p>

Financial sustainability

Councils can fund and meet local needs

The National Inquiry into the financial sustainability of local government¹ found serious risks to councils in Victoria and nationally.

Councils face increasing threat from:

- uncertainty and underfunding from current funding models
- a growing population with associated infrastructure and service needs
- rate capping - despite significant cost increases arising from inflation
- cost shifting from both Federal and State Governments - for example, kindergarten funding.

The ERG has explored measures such as shared services and joint procurement in an effort to reduce costs. Despite this, and given the extent of cost increases, it is inevitable that local government will need to cut services and reduce capital expenditure to remain solvent unless further assistance can be provided by both State and Federal Government.

Federal Financial Assistance Grants have traditionally provided councils with funding certainty. Over time, the amount provided to councils has been reduced from one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue to around 0.55 per cent. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is seeking Financial Assistance Grants to be restored to at least one per cent (ideally two per cent) of Commonwealth taxation revenues. The ERG Councils support this request and seek the support of the State Government in advocating this position.

Compounding this shortfall, rate capping in Victoria has led to an increasing gap between need and funding capacity, particularly in relation to asset renewal. This gap will continue to increase while:

- Rate capping rates fail to recognise asset renewal needs
- Value capture mechanisms are not in place
- Windfall Gains Tax applies to local government reducing the amount available to councils for reinvestment
- Cost and risk shifting to local government continue to occur.

Recent discussions around the *Planning and Environment Act* have also been concerning with a State view proposed that developer contributions raised by Councils could be directed to a metropolitan pool of funds. ERG Councils strongly oppose this approach and believe the legal principle of 'nexus' between contributions captured and benefit must be maintained.

Ask - The State Government:

- **reinstate 50/50 funding for State/local services (such as libraries and school crossing supervisors) in line with the outcomes of the National Inquiry into local government financial sustainability**
- **support local government calls for Federal Financial Assistance Grants to increase to at least one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.**
- **incentivise community infrastructure investment through exempting Councils from Windfall Gains Tax**
- **invest developer contributions and 'value capture' in the Council area where the funds are raised.**

¹ [Inquiry into local government sustainability – Parliament of Australia](#)

Liveable neighbourhoods

Fit for purpose and efficient land use system

Recent major changes to planning strategies, policies, planning provisions and processes in Victoria will have significant impact on the scale and location of development, and how decisions are made. The ERG Councils are concerned that together, these changes have unintended consequences, exclude people from decision making processes, and do not enable community infrastructure to keep pace with growth. Decades of investment and local expertise is being swept aside, rather than built upon.

The ERG Councils are particularly concerned that the new *Townhouse and Low Rise Code* and the Great Design Fast Track process will undermine the core of liveability in Melbourne's East - its leafy, green character. New standards will reduce site coverage, reduce the likelihood of retaining or establishing mature trees and decrease open space requirements, contributing to further canopy loss in the region. This is at odds with one of *Plan for Victoria's* key policy objectives of achieving at least 30 per cent tree canopy coverage.

A full review of the planning system, perhaps as part of the *Planning and Environment Act* review, provides an opportunity for the State Government to consider the impacts of the range of changes made to the system, rigorously examine how the various elements of the system fit together and rework the system so that it is efficient and continues to have transparency and integrity as its hallmarks. The review should be broad in scope and inclusive of local government.

Ask - The State Government:

- **strengthen community involvement in planning and apply the principle of subsidiarity to ensure local communities have input to land use decisions that impact them**
- **ensure a genuine 'seat at the table' for local government to deliver the next generation Victorian planning system (P&E Act review)**
- **resource prompt decision making and scheme amendments at both State and local level**
- **commit to a future State/Local government joint review of the efficacy of the planning reforms taking the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions into account regarding third-party rights and use of local schedules.**

Keeping pace with housing growth

Increased provision of housing to meet population growth is a critical focus of *Victoria's Housing Statement*², *Plan for Victoria* and the Federal Government's *National Housing Accord*³.

Targets set by the State Government suggest that ERG Councils will need to provide for an additional 212,500 dwellings by 2050, an increase of 71 per cent on existing dwelling stock. This has significant implications on community infrastructure that will need to be newly provided or upgraded to meet future demand.

Plan for Victoria 2025, Victoria's strategy to manage future growth, is clear about the need to balance liveability and other strategic outcomes with housing growth. However, it is these elements that are in danger of being pushed aside in the rush to implement new planning controls. If new housing is not well designed and situated or does not have access to a range of community infrastructure (including green space), its liveability will be compromised. Poorly designed housing may also impact on the amenity of surrounding residents. Loss of canopy trees on private land will also accelerate urban heating. Purposeful placemaking and timely provision of

² *Victoria's Housing Statement*, Victorian Government, 2024

³ *National Housing Accord*, Australian Government, 2022

community infrastructure are required to achieve wellbeing, build social cohesion and ensure liveable neighbourhoods.

Number of homes	2023 - Existing		2051 - Total	% growth rate	% growth rate
	homes	Target	homes	(homes)	(population)
Knox	63,100	43,000	110,100	68%	
Manningham	51,000	28,500	90,000	56%	
Maroondah	48,000	39,500	92,000	82%	
Whitehorse	74,000	76,500	153,000	103%	
Yarra Ranges (Green Wedge)	62,700	25,000	90,700	40%	
Total ERG	298,800	212,500	535,800	71%	
Total Metro Melbourne	2,134,200	1,780,000	3,914,200	83%	63%

Table 1: Victoria's draft housing targets

The *Plan for Victoria* will fall short of achieving its objectives without real action 'on the ground' and an on-going funding commitment. While traditionally there have been a number of funding infrastructure streams, future funding for local community infrastructure and support services, such as open space, recreation and cultural facilities has become increasingly uncertain. The expected rapid rollout of housing will place strain on existing services and facilities and the desired liveability outcomes will not be able to be delivered without funding support.

Ask - The State Government:

- **establish a local liveability fund, as a partnership between state and local government for critical community liveability infrastructure to support State housing targets**
- **support ERG calls for the Federal Government to establish a five-year \$1 billion open and indexed funding program for planning and building community infrastructure.**

Regional open space, sport and recreation priorities

The ERG Councils are conscious of the growing demand for open space and recreation facilities and the need for a fair distribution of those facilities across the region. Interconnected open spaces benefit communities, enhance biodiversity, and create urban forest opportunities.

An additional 1,500 hectares of open space is estimated to be required over 30 years.⁴ The *Victorian Housing Statement* (and *Plan for Victoria*) foreshadowed dwelling growth at rates faster than population growth as households become smaller and the nature of housing ownership changes. Private open space available to some dwellings will reduce and pressure on public open spaces will increase. Despite plans for rapid growth no additional parks or open spaces, or additional infrastructure was identified for the region in *Plan for Victoria*.

The ERG Councils wish to work with the State Government to fill this void. A Regional Open Space and Greening Strategy is required. This will also update documents such as the Regional Trails Strategy and ERG *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*⁵ to account for State growth targets and identify open space augmentation and regreening opportunities.

Ask - The State Government:

- **co-fund a Regional Open Space Connectivity and Greening Strategy and implementation**
- **fund a 10 year implementation grants program to contribute to the cost of revegetation**
- **develop and implement tools /planning mechanism to protect and increase tree canopy cover (minimum 30 per cent), re-greening and climate resilience.**

⁴ *Plan East: A proposition for sustainable growth*, Eastern Region Group of Councils & SGS Economics and Planning 2024

⁵ *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*, Eastern Region Group of Councils, 2022

Safer communities

Community safety

Community feedback in the region has identified community safety as an increasing concern. Crime statistics⁶ indicate double digit growth in crime rates for most ERG councils.

While the ERG Councils recognise that there are many areas impacting on community safety that local government can influence, the central responsibility lies with the Victoria Police. The Police then rely on a network of local organisations, particularly in the aftermath of an incident. Councils are key partners and may influence community perceptions of safety through:

- inclusive design and operation of public spaces
- inclusion and safety for marginalised groups
- safety in movement

The ERG coordinated a Community Safety Roundtable to bring together stakeholders that are involved in community safety, crime prevention and perceptions of safety. This useful event helped to align objectives and to further refine the role of local government in community safety.

The ERG Councils will continue to work on social cohesion, supporting vulnerable groups and improving safety and perceptions of safety in public spaces. Partnership with the State Government is required to address safety at public transport interchanges and key hotspots. The continuation of grants such as the *Creating Safer Places* and the *Empowering Communities* Grants are also considered essential to crime prevention.

Ask:

The State Government:

- **lead a collaboration with VicPol, ERG councils and Community Safety organisations that leverages crime prevention data and community knowledge to focus on areas with the greatest potential impact (such as public transport interchanges and high activity areas).**
- **fund community safety and crime prevention activities and pilot programs to:**
 - **engage youth in crime prevention (pilot)**
 - **support local groups to foster community cohesion (small grants)**
 - **'shine a light on safety' - improve lighting in identified hot spots**
 - **deliver Cyber scam awareness programs for older adults through Councils and NFPs.**

⁶ Latest Crime Data by Area, Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, 2024

Build climate resilience

Stronger role for Melbourne Water

Stormwater flooding is prevalent in urban areas of the Yarra River and Dandenong Creek catchments across the region.

While overall annual rainfall will reduce due to climate change, the region is predicted to see more frequent and intense rainfall events that will increase the risk of flooding.⁷ Flooding is exacerbated by an increase in impervious surfaces and associated stormwater flows unless this risk is properly managed.

While the ERG councils are working with Melbourne Water to improve flood mapping across local government areas, there is a low level of confidence that appropriate infrastructure measures will be planned, prioritised, and implemented to address known and projected climate change risks in a timely manner. Melbourne Water must take a stronger leadership role in improving the transparency of flood risk through planning schemes and taking actions to address known risks. The process to amend planning schemes to reflect known risks is costly and cumbersome. Given the approach should be the same across Victoria this exercise should be undertaken by the State, as flagged in a *Plan for Victoria*.

Ask:

The State Government partner with the ERG and relevant agencies and research partners, to improve flood infrastructure planning, prioritisation, funding and delivery at sub-catchment level and to reduce the cost of damage regionally.

Adaptive Community Assets

The annual cost of damage due to climate events is already high and is expected to double within a generation.⁸ There is an urgency to continue adaptation work so that all council assets can risk assessed and modified, as required, to have greater resilience to climate events.

Council	Average annual damage (\$000)			% change in AAD from present day	
	Present day	Nearer future (~2050)	More distant future (~2100)	Nearer future (~2050)	More distant future (~2100)
Knox	2,439	6,790	9,958	178%	308%
Manningham	1,998	6,003	8,682	200%	334%
Maroondah	962	3,006	4,327	212%	350%
Whitehorse	1,234	3,795	5,475	208%	344%
Yarra Ranges	2,459	7,340	10,620	199%	332%
TOTAL for ERG	9,092	26,934	39,062	200%	334%

Table 2: Summary of existing and forecast annual damage for the Eastern Region.

The ERG Councils support the work of the Victorian Climate Change Alliances who co-operatively are quantifying the costs and benefits of climate change adaptation options for local government owned assets. This work includes:

- thorough assessment of economic impacts
- identifying and scoping adaptation options for assets

⁷ Draft Eastern Metro Land Use Framework Plan, Eastern Metropolitan Partnership and the Victorian Government, 2017

⁸ Adaptive Community Assets (Phase 2): Quantifying the economic costs of impacts, Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, 2023

- assessment of costs and benefits of options
- prioritisation of hazard responses
- development of a scaleable risk mapping tool.

The Alliances have self-funded part of the project to address council roads as a priority. They now wish to assess buildings, drainage and natural assets and require additional funding to do so.

The ERG Councils are also playing an important role in increasing the resilience of communities to future climate events. The ERG supports the Australian Local Government Association's call for a \$200 million climate change fund to implement local adaptation actions to limit disruption to communities and local services including energy upgrades.

Ask - The State Government:

- **fund the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action to extend the Adaptive Community Assets project to buildings, drainage, and natural assets.**
- **support advocacy for a \$400M p.a. Federal Adaptation fund (for councils to prepare communities), and \$5 billion p.a. for 10 years (to invest) in energy upgrades.**

Accelerated cooperation

Currently the approach to climate policy, funding and resourcing is fragmented. The risk exposure of the eastern region is significant.

The key extreme risks for the Eastern Region documented in a regional risk assessment⁹ are:

- strategic failure to plan for climate change
- bushfire damage to assets
- increased flood damage
- service delivery failure in extreme weather
- increased demand on council facilities during heatwaves
- inadequate building design
- reduced asset lifespan.

The *National Urban Policy* recognises the importance of working together to build climate resilience. Cooperation of all levels of government, along with industry and the community is required. The ERG Councils request that all levels of government work together to address climate hazards through policy, funding and resourcing.

Ask:

The State Government advocate for an all-levels of government governance model to coordinate and address the fragmented approach to climate policy, funding, and resourcing as requested by the Greenhouse Alliances (including the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action).

⁹ *Adapting to Climate Change in Melbourne's East - A Regional Risk Assessment*, Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership and the Victorian Government, 2013

Transform movement in the east

Better access to local jobs

Despite strong levels of employment self-containment, access to jobs in the region is primarily by car. The region has a highly car dependent population, with 79 per cent of trips made by cars and most households (59%) having two or more vehicles. Only 7.3 per cent of trips are made by public transport.¹⁰

With 53.1 per cent of the Eastern Region's resident workers employed locally,¹¹ and over 85,000 Small-Medium Employers (SMEs)¹² there is significant opportunity to transform movement in Melbourne's east through initiatives to grow local employment and increase the number of jobs readily accessible by public and active transport.

The Federal Government's North East Local Jobs Plan¹³ recognises the challenges of limited transport options for those living outside of main transport hubs, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas with dispersed populations. This is even more difficult for individuals looking to travel north-south and east-west across the outer suburbs.

Infrastructure Victoria research¹⁴ found that buses present a huge opportunity for Melbourne as the most cost-efficient public transport system. The weaknesses and opportunities in the bus network in the region are documented by the ERG Councils with the Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)¹⁵. Priority bus lanes, route extensions, and increased frequency among other interventions are suggested to optimise the region's bus network.

The Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) project could also provide tangible benefits for communities. Done well, it will improve connections between major employment and retail precincts and provide quicker, more reliable travel for many within the region. We understand that an acceptable business case is yet to be provided to the Federal Government. To establish an acceptable business case, the ERG makes three suggestions:

- trial a rapid bus along the SRL route to demonstrate the direct benefits of the route and embed transport behaviour change
- review and modify bus routes connecting to the SRL route to achieve the widest possible benefit
- provide clarity about social and community infrastructure delivery, including social housing and ongoing local employment as part of the project deliverables.

Opportunity also exists to leverage the work being done for SRL precincts and priority precincts to reduce the number of short trips made by car, reduce congestion and improve health outcomes regionally. About 12 per cent of trips are made by walking and a very small percentage of trips (0.75%) by bicycle.¹⁶ Safe and attractive walking and cycling routes (including for e-bikes to counter distance and topography) to and within precincts is a key objective of the ERG councils.¹⁷

Priority projects to improve access to jobs and services and for active transport can be found in Appendix 1. The ERG Councils consider the extent and range of identified projects requires careful and cooperative planning through an Integrated Transport Plan.

Ask - The State Government:

- **fund a regional Integrated Transport Plan to address gaps and link major transport nodes and deliver identified funding priorities across all modes**

¹⁰ Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity (VISTA), Department of Transport and Planning Victorian Government, 2020

¹¹ Melbourne Functional Economic Region, Infrastructure Victoria, 2019

¹² Number of small-medium employers by local area, REMPLAN

¹³ North-east Local Jobs Plan, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Australian Government, 2024 (modified)

¹⁴ Get on Board: making the most of Melbourne's buses, Infrastructure Victoria, 2024

¹⁵ Better Transport for Melbourne's East, Eastern Transport Coalition, 2022

¹⁶ Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity (VISTA), Department of Transport and Planning Victorian Government, 2020

¹⁷ Eastern Regional Trails Strategy, Eastern Region Group of Councils, 2018

- *create an active transport funding stream to connect bike paths and trails so that active transport initiatives do not have to compete with sport and recreation facilities*
- *fund a rapid bus pilot along the Suburban Rail Loop route.*

Supporting agriculture

The primary freight challenges in the region are congestion on main routes and the quality of access to agribusiness. The 'last mile' access for agribusinesses is inhibited by unsealed roads which damage produce and contaminate crops.¹⁸ The economic output for agribusiness alone represents \$1,300 million each year.¹⁹

The previous *Roads for the Community* initiative enabled Yarra Ranges Council to seal 180 kilometres of road over nine years through this program.²⁰ A similar commitment is sought to design and construct 300 kilometres of sealed roads throughout the region and reach key local producers.

Ask:

The State Government fund a program to seal a further 300 kilometres of unsealed roads to improve access for agribusiness and increase productivity in the eastern region.

¹⁸ *Advocacy Agenda 2022*, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2022

¹⁹ Value of industry, REMPLAN (ABS 2024 data release 1)

²⁰ *Advocacy Agenda 2022*, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2022

Growing our local economy

Stronger creative industries

Growing local businesses and local activities grows local employment. Despite strong levels of employment self-containment in the eastern region, challenges remain for people with a disability, women over 45, culturally and linguistically diverse people, disengaged youth, and First Nations people in accessing employment.

The contribution of creative industries to the Victorian economy is growing year on year (\$40.5B in 2022-23) and often utilises council infrastructure (galleries, museums, performing arts venues, libraries and the public realm). Festivals, events, public art and cultural programs build community and create local employment.

The ERG Councils wish to enhance cooperative economic development activities, particularly around the creative industries, and there is an opportunity to take a strategic approach to programming to make better use of regional infrastructure and support development pathways for artists and the region's creative industries. This should increase opportunities, leverage investments and reduce duplication. A partnership approach with the State Government would enable this initiative to go further, faster.

Ask:

The State Government co-fund a regional initiative to promote employment in the creative industries, leverage arts and cultural facilities across the region and strengthen pathways for artists.

Appendix 1: Transport Advocacy Priorities

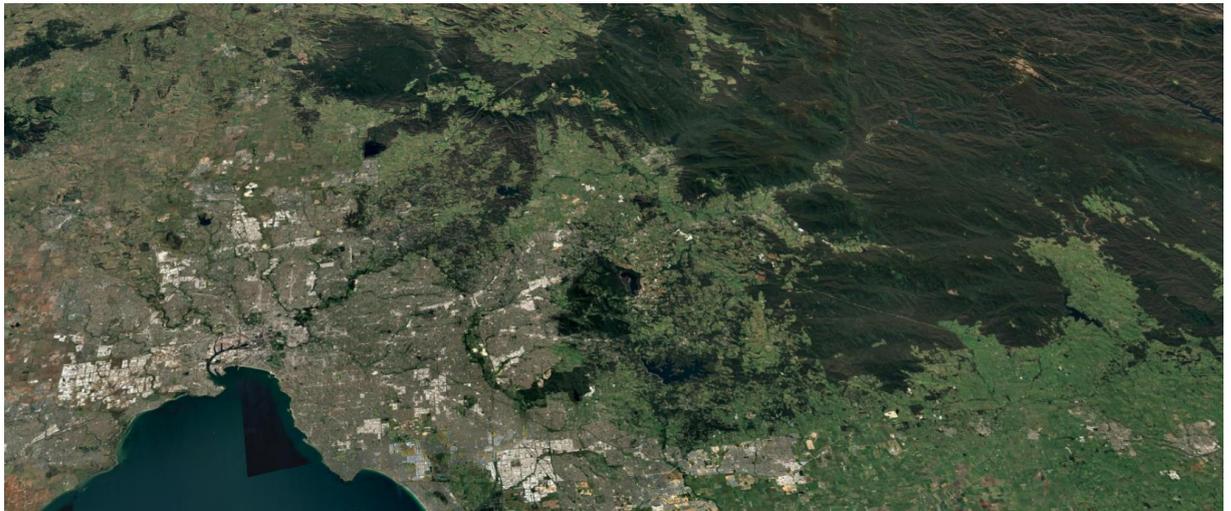
*Extracted from Council Transport Strategies, ERG advocacy platforms and Eastern Transport Coalition priorities

	Knox	Manningham	Maroondah	Whitehorse	Yarra Ranges
<i>Note - if no reference cited, the priority is in the Council's Transport Strategy or Plan</i>	Knox Integrated Transport Plan 2015	Manningham Transport Action Plan 2023	Maroondah Transport Strategy 2025	Whitehorse Integrated Transport Strategy 2011 Box Hill Integrated Transport Plan (ITP))	Connected - Integrated Transport Plan 2020
Rail	Rowville Rail - a heavy rail line to Rowville	<p>Include Doncaster Hill in Stage 1 of the Suburban Rail Loop</p> <p>Work with SRLA to secure the land for Doncaster Hill station (as part of SRL)</p> <p>Investigate Bulleen Station as part of SRL route</p>	<p>Duplication between Mooroolbark and Lilydale</p> <p>High capacity signalling along the Burnley Group of rail lines to increase capacity</p> <p>Timetable enhancements to Ringwood (10 mins all day, seven days a week)</p> <p>Bicycle parking at Heathmont Station</p>	<p>Third rail line between Box Hill and Ringwood</p> <p>Increase train capacity and service levels (<i>Box Hill ITP</i>)</p> <p>Upgrade Box Hill Station (<i>Box Hill ITP</i>)</p>	<p>Duplicate between Mooroolbark and Lilydale - with a new station at Lilydale Quarry</p> <p>Duplicate between Ferntree Gully and Upwey (with second platform at Tecoma) (<i>also Maroondah Transport Strategy 2025</i>)</p> <p>Improve service frequencies and reliability on the Lilydale & Belgrave Lines. High capacity signalling, expand track capacity</p>
Road: <i>New / studies</i>			Colchester Road Freight Study		Lilydale Bypass (<i>ERG State Govt. Advocacy 2022</i>)
Road: <i>Duplication / upgrade / extension</i>	<p>Dorset Road</p> <p>Napoleon Road (<i>ERG Top 3 priorities</i>)</p> <p>Wellington Road (<i>ERG Top 3 priorities</i>)</p>	<p>Templestowe Road (including bus priority measures and shared active transport path) (<i>also ETC</i>)</p> <p>Manningham Road interchange design improvements - North East Link</p> <p>Jumping Creek Road upgrade and extend</p>	<p>Canterbury Road (Eastlink to Mt Dandenong Rd) - widening for freight access to Bayswater Business Precinct</p> <p>Maroondah Hwy Boulevard Extension (east and west of Ringwood Station) - part of Masterplan (& <i>ERG Top 3</i>)</p> <p>Dorset Road - Rural Road standard to urban, including essential infrastructure like footpaths, crossings and kerb and channel</p>	<p>Modify the road network (reallocation of road space) to reduce through traffic on Whitehorse Road and Station Street (<i>Box Hill ITP</i>)</p>	<p>Maroondah Hwy, Coldstream (<i>ETC</i>)</p> <p>Maroondah Hwy, Chirnside Park Road widening (<i>ETC</i>)</p> <p>Main Street, Lilydale</p> <p>Road sealing for emergencies /last mile (<i>ERG top3 & State Govt. Advocacy 2022, Fed Govt. Advocacy 2025</i>)</p>

	Knox	Manningham	Maroondah	Whitehorse	Yarra Ranges
Road: <i>Intersection upgrade</i>	Burwood Hwy and Cathies Lane (ETC) High Street Road and Mowbray Drive, Wantirna South (ETC) (Planning funded April 25)	Upgrade the Eastern Freeway/Hoddle St intersection to allow bus priority (funded?)	Maroondah Hwy and Yarra Road (ETC) (planning funded April 25) Bayswater Rd at Eastfield Road including Mall Shopping Centre Plymouth Road and Kalinda Road roundabout and Warranwood Road Warrandyte and Oban Road including North Ringwood Shopping Centre		Warburton Hwy/Douthie Road, Seville East (ETC)
Road safety				40 km/h speed limits on Whitehorse Road and Station Street (Box Hill ITP)	Safety for bike riders on - Mt Dandenong Tourist Road, Mountain Hwy, Olinda-Monbulk Road, and Monbulk Road Safety audit of Warburton Hwy
Pedestrian safety: <i>Pedestrian-Operated-Signal design and installation</i>	Scoresby Road, Knoxfield, near Camden Park Parade (ETC) Stud Road, Scoresby, near Rosa Street (ETC)	Victoria Street between Ruffey Lake Park and Rieschiecks Reserve (ETC) Reynolds Road, Templestowe at Smiths Road (ETC)	Bayswater Road at Eastfield Road including Mall Shopping Centre Ringwood Street, Ringwood-between Ringwood Bypass and Loughnan Road (ETC) Warrandyte and Oban Road including North Ringwood Shopping Centre	Whitehorse Road, Nunawading, near Goodwin Street (ETC) Springvale Road, Forest Hill, near Pilita Street (ETC)	Warburton Hwy, Wandin, where the Warburton Rail Trail crosses the highway between Edmond Crescent and Alfred Street (ETC) Warburton Hwy, Yarra Junction, where the Warburton Rail Trail crosses the highway, 110m north-west of the eastern end of Barack Drive (ETC)
Tram/trackless tram	Route 75 Tram Extension along Burwood Hwy and Mountain Hwy (ETC) Caulfield to Rowville Trackless Tram (ETC)			Route 75 Tram Extension along Burwood Hwy to Knox City Upgrade the Box Hill tram terminus to accommodate two tram platforms and the longer E-Class trams (Box Hill ITP) Extend the tram line to Middleborough Rd (Box Hill ITP)	
Bus: <i>New Route</i>	Between Bayswater Station and Stud Park via Henderson Road (ETC)	Express (high capacity) that mirrors the SRL alignment to build patronage	Circuit route to connect Ringwood's residential areas to	Express (high capacity) that mirrors the SRL alignment to build patronage between Box	Urgent review to address poor frequencies, lack of integration and additional bus routes

	Knox	Manningham	Maroondah	Whitehorse	Yarra Ranges
		Premium (direct and frequent) along the Templestowe Road Corridor (between The Pines Shopping Centre and Heidelberg Station linking to the LaTrobe NEIC) <i>(also ETC)</i>	the station and community facilities <i>(also ETC)</i>	Hill and Latrobe University (<i>Box Hill ITP</i>) Canterbury Road Corridor (between Box Hill and Heathmont) <i>(ETC)</i>	
Bus: Improvement / redesign	Redesign Route 75 and convert to an on-demand service <i>(ETC)</i> Redesign Route 757 and convert to on demand service <i>(ETC)</i>		Extend Route 688 along Mt Dandenong Road to Ringwood Station - review <i>(ETC)</i> Minor Route 664 deviation along The Range Boulevard into The Range Estate and instal signals and new bus stops at Dorset Road and The Range Boulevard <i>(also ETC)</i> Upgrade Route 737 to Smartbus frequency including weekends Upgrade Routes 671, 672 and 689 to improve frequency including weekends	Combine routes 284 & 271 Combine routes 765 & 766 Operate route 281 as a through route on Elgar Road Operate route 733 on Middleborough Road and Whitehorse Road Alter route 903 to operate on Elgar Road between Riversdale Road and Burwood Hwy to provide a better connection to Deakin University.	Pulse timetables for Belgrave and Lilydale Stations - alignment of train and bus
On-demand bus trials	Baysie Shuttle Bus - from station to Bayswater Business Precinct <i>(ETC)</i>	Manningham Mover - Routes 280 and 282 <i>(ETC)</i>		Routes 735 and 765 <i>(ETC)</i>	Mt Dandenong - Routes 694, 696, 697, 699 <i>(ETC)</i> Healesville to Chum Creek - Route 687 <i>(ETC)</i> One on-demand pilot project within 12 months
Community transport					Pilot in the Upper Yarra area
Bus infrastructure		Bus priority infrastructure in association with a new express route along the SRL route) Doncaster Road Corridor - separated 24 hour land, priority at intersections, bus stations, rationalise stops and improve facilities <i>(also ETC)</i>	Mt Dandenong Road Corridor - priority at intersections including Dorset Rd, Colchester Rd and Liverpool Rd Canterbury Road Corridor (Great Ryrie to Liverpool Rd) - priority at intersections, ingress and egress to bus stops and real time monitoring	<i>(All Box Hill ITP)</i> Box Hill Transit Interchange - PSO's, widen footpath and waiting areas, myki readers at entry, reconsider relocating the bus interchange <i>(also ETC)</i> Provide for better bus layover facilities	Bike racks on buses DDA compliant bus stops

	Knox	Manningham	Maroondah	Whitehorse	Yarra Ranges
			Wantirna Road - peak only bus lanes, priority at intersections, bus stop improvements and real time monitoring	Bus lane and signal priority along Whitehorse Road between the Town Hall and Elgar Road and on Station Street	
Active transport / pedestrian crossings	Implement measures identified in the Knox Cycling Action Plan 2024	Connect to the Main Yarra Trail (including the Birrarung Park Bridge and Bulleen Park Bridge) (also ETC)		<p>Box Hill Rail Trail (<i>Eastern Region Trail Strategy & ETC</i>)</p> <p>(<i>All Box Hill ITP</i>): New separated cycling lanes on Whitehorse Rd in Box Hill</p> <p>New walking/cycling bridge over the rail line - between Prospect St and Hopetoun Pde</p> <p>Upgrade Box Hill Mall pedestrian environment and 29 road crossings in precinct</p> <p>Plan for the Hawthorn to Box Hill Strategic Cycling Corridor (<i>also ERG Trails</i>)</p> <p>Upgrade and extend the shared use path along Bank St from its current terminus to Station St</p> <p>Upgrade along Whitehorse Road between Nelson Rd and Box Hill Town Hall</p> <p>An off-road path or protected on-road lanes along Nelson Road (an SCC route) connecting to the walking/cycling bridge over the railway line</p>	<p>Ferny Creek Trail (<i>Eastern Region Trail Strategy & ETC</i>)</p> <p>Yarra Valley Trail (Yering to Yarra Glen - Stage 18) (<i>Eastern Region Trail Strategy & ETC</i>)</p> <p>Cycling / Trails Transport Network</p>
Parking				Remove parking along Whitehorse Road between the Town Hall and Elgar Road, and along Station Street (<i>Box Hill ITP</i>)	Parking Overstay Detection System in high demand areas and digital signage for availability
Electric vehicle charging	Increase number of publicly available charging stations (Council's EV policy June 2025)			Increase the number of electric vehicle charging points in private facilities.	Develop publicly available charging stations



Contact

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4.6 Audit and Risk Committee - Independent Member Appointment

Final Report Destination:	Council
Paper Type:	For Decision
Author:	Head of Risk and Assurance, Debbie Pulham
Manager:	Manager Governance and Risk, Andrew Dowling
Executive:	Interim Director, Customer and Performance, Matt Kelleher

SUMMARY

This report considers the outcome of the recruitment process for an Independent Member to the Audit and Risk Committee and recommends the appointment of the preferred candidate in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee's Charter.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Appoint the preferred candidate as set out in Confidential Attachment 1, to the Audit and Risk Committee for the period December 2025 to December 2028, in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee Charter.
2. Pursuant to Section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020, to authorise the confidential information in the attachments to this report to be publicly available for the limited purpose of communicating the effect of this Resolution to the extent necessary to give effect to it.
3. To authorise the Chief Executive Officer (or such person the Chief Executive Officer selects) to communicate the effect of these resolutions to the extent necessary at their discretion, including for the purpose of informing the community about the content of the report or Council's decision.
4. Acknowledge and thank Mr Geoff Harry for his contribution to Knox over the past five years as an Independent Member and Chair of the Knox Audit and Risk Committee.

1. DISCUSSION

Knox City Council's Audit and Risk Committee (the Committee) is an independent Advisory Committee, established under section 53 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) and operates in accordance with the Audit and Risk Committee Charter – May 2025 (the Charter).

The Charter provides that membership shall comprise three Independent Members and two Councillors appointed by Council with:

- Councillor members appointed annually in November concurrently with the annual Mayoral elections (the current members are the Mayor, Councillor Lisa Cooper and Councillor Susan Pearce).
- Independent Members appointed for three-year terms. At the conclusion of their first term, Independent Members may be reappointed for one additional three-year term subject to satisfactory performance, to a maximum of six years' service in total.

Current independent Members are:

- Mr Mick Jaensch – appointed as a Committee Member in May 2023.
- Ms Suzie Thoraval – appointed as a Committee Member in August 2025.

Mr Geoff Harry stood down as Member and Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee in September 2025, triggering the recruitment process for a new independent member.

A “Recruitment and Selection Panel” was established in accordance with the Charter to recommend the preferred appointment to Council for consideration. The Panel comprised the Mayor Councillor Lisa Cooper; Councillor Susan Pearce; the Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Dobson; and Acting Independent Chairperson, Mr Mick Jaensch. The Recruitment and Selection Panel was chaired by Mr Mick Jaensch.

The vacancy on the Committee was advertised on Council’s Jobs portal and via:

- Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Seek
- Women on Boards
- LinkedIn

An Invitation for Expressions of Interest was released outlining the role and the following selection criteria:

- Be familiar with governance and operations in Victorian Local Government, the current and emerging risks, and control strategies relevant to the sector.
- Be able to provide external insight from beyond local government in relation to the audit function and risk and compliance management.
- Have experience working in a complex organisation at a senior level.
- Have relevant professional qualifications and experience, for example in business management, finance, accounting, legal, risk management, or audit and compliance. Organisational performance, and/or business transformation experience is also highly regarded.
- Be able to attend meetings in person at Council’s Civic Centre (Wantirna South, Victoria).
- Prior experience on an Audit and Risk Committee in a local government environment would be highly regarded.
- Have strong ethical values, sense of integrity.
- Have strong interpersonal and communication skills including capacity for constructive enquiry and an ability to provide Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer and Management with well-rounded and professional advice concerning the adequacy of Council’s administrative, operational, financial and accounting systems, practices and controls; performance reporting regimes; and risk management processes.

The Charter provides that Independent Members of the Committee must collectively have expertise in financial management, risk management and experience in public sector management. Advertising noted the selection of the successful applicant would also have regard to this objective.

A total of 51 applications were received and included a significant number of very high calibre applicants. The Recruitment and Selection Panel reviewed the applications and shortlisted three applicants for interview.

Following the evaluation and interview process, the Recruitment and Selection Panel identified a preferred candidate for appointment as the Independent Member.

The preferred candidate has relevant qualifications, significant relevant experience, experience on Audit and Risk Committees for comparable Local Governments and other entities, and is considered a strong cultural and skills fit for the Committee.

The preferred candidate's application is included in Confidential Attachment 1. Applications from non-recommended shortlisted candidates are provided in Confidential Attachment 2 for Council's information.

2. ENGAGEMENT

Not Applicable.

3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the recommendation is considered to have no direct implications or has no direct impacts upon Council's Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040, exposure to climate risks or climate change adaptation.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Independent Members of Council's Audit and Risk Committee currently receive an annual remuneration of \$9,079.88, indexed annually in July by the Consumer Price Index which is provided for in the operational budget of the Governance and Risk Department.

7. RISKS

The selection criteria employed for the recruitment process supported a focus on identifying a preferred candidate who will contribute to a strong, well-balanced Audit and Risk Committee with the independence, financial expertise, and governance and risk experience needed for effective oversight. This enhances Council's capacity to manage risk proactively, uphold sound decision-making, and maintain public trust.

8. COUNCIL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2025-2029

Leading, listening and governing responsibly

Strategy 4.1 - Council demonstrates its accountability through transparent and responsible decision-making and working together productively.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidential Attachments 1 and 2 are included in the confidential agenda, as they contain confidential information pursuant to Council's Governance Rules and Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2020, as it relates to: personal information, names, addresses and other personal and professional information regarding prospective committee members which would be unreasonable to disclose publicly, or to disclose before a Committee Member is appointed.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

5 Notices Of Motion

6 Supplementary Items

Nil

7 Urgent Business

8 Confidential Items