Mildura Rural City Council

MINUTES

Ordinary Meeting of Council

5:30pm Wednesday 27 January 2021

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VENUE:
Committee & Council Room
76 Deakin Ave, Mildura

NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL
5:30pm Wednesday 24 February 2021

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SARAH PHILPOTT

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

1 PRAYER AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Mayor read the Council prayer and paid respects to the traditional land owners.

2 OPENING AND WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed Councillors, management, staff and members of the public viewing the live stream.

3 PRESENT

Councillors

Cr Jason Modica	Mayor
Cr Helen Healy	Deputy Mayor
Cr Ian Arney	
Cr Stefano De Pieri	
Cr Mark Eckel	
Cr Glenn Milne	
Cr Cyndi Power	
Cr Jodi Reynolds	
Cr Liam Wood	

Officers

Sarah Philpott	Chief Executive Officer
Mandy Whelan	General Manager Development
Martin Hawson	General Manager Community
Chris Parham	General Manager Corporate
Richard Sexton	Manager Corporate Administration

4 APOLOGIES AND ABSENCES

Nil

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5 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

2021/0001

Moved: **Cr Helen Healy**
Seconded: **Cr Glenn Milne**

That the minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

That the minutes of the Special Confidential Meeting of Council held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

That the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Wednesday 16 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

That the Minutes of the Confidential Meeting of Council held on Wednesday 16 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

CARRIED

6 CONFIRMATION OF COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

In accordance with Part 23 of Council's Governance Rules, records of Council Auspiced Meetings must be reported to the next Ordinary Meeting of Council and confirmed in the minutes.

A Council Auspiced Meeting is defined in the Governance Rules as a meeting at which matters are considered that are intended or likely to be the subject of a Council decision or the exercise of a delegated authority and which is either of the following:

- A meeting of an advisory committee where at least one Councillor is present; or
- A planned or scheduled meeting that includes at least half the Councillors and at least one Council officer.

The record is therefore presented for Council's noting.

2021/0002

Moved: **Cr Jodi Reynolds**
Seconded: **Cr Cyndi Power**

That Council note the following records of Council Auspiced Meetings:

- **Planning Forum - 14 December 2020**
- **Council Forum - 13 January 2021**
- **Portfolio Discussions - 19 January 2021**

CARRIED

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RECORD OF COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

Meeting Details	Councillor Attendees	Other Attendees	Matters Discussed	Conflict of Interest Disclosures
Planning Forum 14 December 2020	Cr Modica Cr Healy Cr Arney Cr De Pieri Cr Eckel Cr Milne Cr Reynolds	Sarah Philpott, Chief Executive Officer Andrew Millen, Manager Development Services Matthew Jackson, Principal Statutory Planner	1. Planning Application 005.2020.00000277.001 2. Planning Application 005.2020.00000092.001	Nil
Council Forum 13 January 2021	Cr Modica Cr Healy Cr Arney Cr De Pieri Cr Eckel Cr Milne Cr Power Cr Reynolds Cr Wood	Sarah Philpott, Chief Executive Officer Mark Jenkins, Acting General Manager Community Matt George, Acting General Manager Development Chris Parham, General Manager Corporate Charmaine Calis, Acting Manager Corporate Administration Ben Piscioneri, Media Officer	1. Powerhouse Precinct – On-site Inspection 2. Mildura Riverfront Stage 2 Project Update - Village Square 3. Draft Community Engagement Policy CP020 4. Rezoning of Former Merbein School Sites - 456 Paschendale Avenue, Merbein West & 13 Jenner Street, Merbein 5. Councillor Code of Conduct 6. Media Relations Policy CP049 7. Councillor Portfolios 8. Monthly Management Report 9. Mildura South Regional Sporting Precinct Project Update & Intersection Works	Cr Glenn Milne disclosed a general conflict of interest on matter 9.
Portfolio Discussions 19 January 2021	Cr Healy Cr Arney Cr De Pieri Cr Eckel Cr Power Cr Reynolds Cr Wood	Sarah Philpott, Chief Executive Officer Mark Jenkins, Acting General Manager Community Mandy Whelan, General Manager Development Chris Parham, General Manager Corporate Richard Sexton, Manager Corporate Administration	1. Councillor Portfolios	Nil

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7 NOTIFICATION OF ABSENCE

Nil

8 MAYORAL REPORT

8.1 MAYORAL REPORT DECEMBER 2020

Summary

The following is an update on the activities and functions attended by the Mayor, Cr Jason Modica during the month of December 2020.

2021/0003

Moved: Cr Stefano De Pieri
Seconded: Cr Ian Arney

That Council note the contents of this report.

CARRIED

9 COUNCILLOR REPORTS

9.1 COUNCILLOR REPORTS DECEMBER 2020

Summary

The following is a report on the activities and functions attended by Councillors during the month of December 2020.

2021/0004

Moved: Cr Mark Eckel
Seconded: Cr Stefano De Pieri

That Council note the contents of this report.

CARRIED

NB: In addition, Cr Eckel advised that he did not attend the Mildura Living Magazine Summer Launch Event.

NB: In addition, Cr Healy advised that she attended the funeral of Barkindji elder Patrick Lawson.

NB: In addition, Cr Power spoke regarding her meeting with Professor Kumar and Dr Joe, who treat local patients with Hepatitis C, and both of whom travel to the area each month at their own cost to undertake pro bono work. Cr Power further advised that they would like to provide a presentation to Councillors at a Council Forum, regarding the possibility of undertaking a microstudy in Mildura to eradicate Hepatitis C.

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NB: In addition, Cr De Pieri advised that prior to Christmas, he was involved in providing a luncheon to the employees of Mildura Base Public Hospital. The event was attended by approximately 500 people, and was a token of appreciation to the hard work of the hospital staff particularly over the past 12 months.

NB: In addition, Cr De Pieri advised that he also hosted a dinner for the young trainee doctors as a way to welcome them into our community.

NB: In addition, Cr De Pieri advised that he has been appointed to the Birchip Cropping Group.

NB: In addition, Cr De Pieri spoke regarding his attendance at the Australia Day Event in Merbein and noted Leon Wagner who was posthumously awarded a medal at the event.

10 RESPONSES TO COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS

Nil

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11 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

11.1 CR MARK ECKEL MILDURA COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

File Number: 16/05/02

"Have we been in touch with the winning tenderer, for the Mildura Country Music Festival, and whether there will be an event this year? If so, can we have a full report on their plan for the event in 2021 and the proposed dates?"

This question was taken on notice.

11.2 CR MARK ECKEL NATIONAL FLAGS AT THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

File Number: 02/01/06

"I refer to the Mildura Rural City Council community nations flags in the Visitor Information Centre. I would like a costing for acquiring another set, taking into consideration that most of the nations' embassies would provide them for free anyway if you wrote a letter. The static display is impressive but I think we need to be more creative in celebrating our cultural diversity with the flags rather than just having them on display at the back of the Visitor Information Centre, which incidentally at the moment has been roped off for some time. If I could have an answer on that, I'd appreciate it."

This question was taken on notice.

11.3 CR MARK ECKEL CULTURAL PLAN DEVELOPMENT

File Number: 02/01/06

"At the discretion of the Mayor and the CEO, could time be allowed at our future Council Forum for discussion to be had around the opportunity of Council having a comprehensive cultural plan for the municipality? And could that be done preferably prior to the budget process for 2021?"

This question was taken on notice.

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11.4 CR STEFANO DE PIERI ASSISTANCE FOLLOWING HAILSTORM EVENT

File Number: 02/01/06

"I happened to be in the area of Nangiloc and Colignan, so this really comes from my heart rather than from my head. I was not aware of the devastation caused by the freak event on 1 January 2021. I was working on that day and I was not informed, but I understand the damage was very extensive and very grave, and so I wonder if there is anything Council can do to help, or have we been asked for help, or if they are managing it themselves. It seems to me that a lot of money has been lost and I wonder if anything can be done to help some of the people that have lost virtually millions?"

Cr Glenn Milne additionally noted:

"I actually went down there the morning after the hailstorm, and it ran right through Colignan down to the back of Nangiloc. There was a substantial amount of almonds on the ground. They were going to try to pick them up off the ground before they rotted and dried them, so substantial damage to citrus and table grapes, so we do need to follow that up."

This question was taken on notice.

11.5 CR GLENN MILNE POWERHOUSE PRECINCT CONCEPT PLANS

File Number: PROJ/500533

"We currently have the riverfront plan out for public comment, and some major concerns have already been raised publicly and by the Councillors. Following the submissions being considered, will there be enough time to change the proposed design, should that need to happen, and meet the expectation desires of the community as well as the timelines required for government funding?"

This question was taken on notice.

11.6 CR GLENN MILNE WILD DOG MANAGEMENT

File Number: 12/12/01

"Can I flag the issue of wild dogs attacking stock on farms near state and national parks? It is an issue. There is a farmer out on the edge of the Wyperfeld National Park that lost 60-100 sheep to wild dogs. Sheep are worth somewhere $240-$300 each, it's a big loss. The state government has a wild dog management program that they have recently put $6 million worth of funding into. Can we write to the government regarding that program and highlight the plight of the farmers in the north-west in our area and see if we can actually push a little bit harder to get a bit more funding into that to try and address the problem?"

This question was taken on notice.

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11.7 CR GLENN MILNE FUTURE OF LANGTREE MALL

File Number: 02/01/06

"When will Council be able to meet, or is there already a meeting planned, with property and business owners in the Mall to discuss the issues relating to the commercial future of the precinct?"

Sarah Philpott, Chief Executive Officer advised that Councillors were recently provided with a preliminary briefing in regard to Council's adopted position around the CBD Plan and some of the preceding work around the Mall. Ms Philpott also advised that Councillors have requested a further discussion regarding this subject and this is expected to occur in the coming weeks.

11.8 CR CYNDI POWER RURAL POOL UPGRADES

File Number: 02/01/06

"My question is a result of time spent with the Underbool community regarding their pool. The pool is still leaking and needs a new liner. Funding was allocated in the 2019 Budget to upgrade rural pools. It hasn't been spent as agreed with the Recreation department, or carried forward in the current Budget. It was listed in the 2019-2020 Budget on page 51, section 4.5.2 Pool Liner for Rural Swimming Pool. It fails to appear in the 2020-2021 Budget page 57, Works carried forward. The community is wondering where has that money gone to, and when will a rural pool get a new liner?"

Mandy Whelan, General Manager Development advised that there has been a response provided to the community in late 2020, answering those questions. A written report will also be provided to Councillors.

11.9 CR JODI REYNOLDS LAND ADJACENT TO SUNRAYSIA HOCKEY CLUB

File Number: 02/01/06

"I was at a meeting with the Sunraysia Hockey Club and they were disappointed that they missed out on substantial funding for a grant that they put in earlier on in the year, probably due to the fact that they're not exactly sure what the status of the land is adjacent to the hockey club there. My question is, what is the status of that land adjacent to the hockey club, who does it belong to, and what are the opportunities for the hockey club to develop that land for more hockey fields?"

This question was taken on notice.

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11.10 CR JODI REYNOLDS BIKE TRACKS

File Number: 16/03/01

"We have a bike track that had been used about four years ago in Merbein around the river area there, but the bike club has not been able to use that track recently. In fact, Council has been discouraging people from using the track by putting logs in the way of the track, which has not necessarily had the effect they might have wanted. It's actually made the tracks a bit more dangerous and causes damage to the environment. They may be, and I think there is, a real opportunity for bike tracks in Mildura, as they are great tourist attractions in other parts of Australia. I think encouraging people to use outdoor activities, bike tracks and the like is well in line with our Recreation Strategy. Is there a possibility we could generate a report that talks about costings and potential sites for opportunities for an adventure bike track or two, equivalent to those that are in Adelaide, Bright and Yackandandah for example, within certain timeframes if that's possible."

Martin Hawson, General Manager Community took this question on notice, however he advised that such a proposal would have to come to Council as a new initiative budget proposal. Mr Hawson further advised that this is not currently in any budget strategies and it would have to come back as part of the budget discussions.

11.11 CR HELEN HEALY RESOURCES FOR GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES

File Number: 02/01/06

"With the approaching budget, can we have constructive feedback defining requirements to provide resources for gender equality, elevated by having a gender equality portfolio, to support the work of the past three years addressing family violence and gender equality issues impact on both men and women?"

This question was taken on notice.

12 NOTICES OF MOTION

Nil

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13 PETITIONS, JOINT LETTERS AND DEPUTATIONS

13.1 PETITION - ASH AVENUE, KOORLONG ROAD CONDITION

Summary

A petition has been received requesting action on the road condition of Ash Avenue, Koorlong.

The petition contains 15 physical signatures.

A copy of both correspondence and attached petitions has been distributed directly to Councillors as privacy issues prevent inclusion within the Agenda.

2021/0005

Moved: **Cr Stefano De Pieri**
Seconded: **Cr Glenn Milne**

That Council note the petition and that this matter be considered within Management Report Item 14.5 of the January Ordinary Meeting of Council.

CARRIED

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14 MANAGEMENT REPORTS

14.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY CP020

Summary

The purpose of this report to present the revised Community Engagement Policy CP020 for adoption.

2021/0006

Moved: **Cr Jodi Reynolds**
Seconded: **Cr Helen Healy**

That Council adopt the revised Community Engagement Policy CP020 as presented.

CARRIED

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Mildura Rural City Council

Community Engagement Policy
Policy – CP020

Prepared	Reviewed	Approved	Date	Council Minute No.
Community Engagement Officer	Executive Leadership Team	Council	January 2021	2021/0006
Trim File: 18/02/01		**To be reviewed:** January 2025		
Document Owner: Manager Community Futures		**Review Frequency:** Every four years		

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1. Purpose

Mildura Rural City Council (Council) is committed to accountable, transparent and responsive decision making informed through the consistent application of well-designed community engagement

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement Framework and the Community Engagement Planning Guide which outline the *type and form of community engagement proposed having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and level of resourcing.*[1] The companion documents describe the specific planning, implementation and reporting activities to be undertaken for engagement processes.

By undertaking our engagement planning process, Council will apply the following elements:

- Members of our community have the right to be informed and to have the opportunities to influence Council decisions that impact their lives or the environment in which they live, work or participate.
- Community and stakeholder knowledge/awareness enhances a sustainable decision making process.
- Council will consider the issue at hand and the number of people affected. Council's level of engagement will reflect this.
- Community involvement in Council decision making will result in greater trust and confidence in Council's decision making process.
- Council decision making will be equitable, transparent, responsive, accountable and accessible.

[1] Section 55 (2) (e) Victorian Local Government Act 2020

2. Policy Statement

This Policy underpins Council's strategic commitment to community centered practice, through systematic integration of the key elements of good community engagement design into our day to day practice.

As a result this policy seeks to emphasise the importance of:

- Early engagement planning to ensure appropriate consideration of all implications in particular the impact on community.
- Community Engagement practice as a meaningful, collaborative and user focused process, to be delivered consistently at the level appropriate to the circumstances (see Table 4 – Levels of Engagement).
- Embedding the Local Government Act 2020 Community Engagement principles, and IAP2 Values into our organisation's engagement practice, policies and strategic plans.
- Determining the appropriate tools and methods for community engagement based on a wide range of factors, including but not limited to:
  - Purpose
  - Scope
  - Objectives
  - extent of the impact on the community
  - who will be impacted by the decision
  - consideration of community concerns and priorities
  - consideration of project timeframes and resources
  - genuine need to engage
  - Legislative, or regulatory requirements.
- Innovation to build on the effectiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for community to participate in engagement with Council.
- Empowering the entire organisation to be confident and effective community engagement practitioners.
- A continuous improvement approach to community engagement practice through strategic evaluation and valuable measurement systems.
- Closing the communication loop, feeding back information to community about their contribution to the decision; and the outcome of the decision making process.

3. Implementation and Engagement Resources

The day to day practice to support implementation of this Policy is available to ensure our organisation can implement the requirements in line with best practice community engagement, staff will be supported in the following ways:

- Access to a suite of resources and tools to support them to prepare, design, deliver, report and evaluate their community engagement activities. This

includes a planning process, a plan development template, a companion Community Engagement Planning Guide, planning tools, checklists and a dedicated community engagement platform.

- Access to training and professional development.
- Access to expert staff support to provide advice and guidance on matters relating to engagement planning and delivery, resource allocation, communications and best practice engagement methods.

4. Scope

This policy applies to Council members sitting as the elected body, Council employees, contractors, agents and consultants acting on behalf of Council with the understanding that well planned community engagement is the responsibility of our entire organisation.

5. Principles and Values

The principles and values table below (Table 1) guides the Community Engagement Practice objectives for Mildura Rural City Council.

They are aligned to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation*, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) *Public Participation Principles* the Community Engagement principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020 (the Act)* with the values and expectations of our community.

Table1.

The Act Principles	**IAP2 Core Values**	**Community Values**	**Our Practice Commitment** (developed in reference to Section 55 (1 & 2) of the Act)
Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.	**Respectful**	We respect community's right to be involved in decisions that impact them. We will respect the lived experience of our community members; and ask that they equally respect Elected Members and Council staff. We will listen to the wants and needs of the community.
		Meaningful	We will provide opportunity to the community in relevant circumstances to co-design solutions for the betterment of our community. We will engage on matters that are of importance to our community. We will provide authentic opportunities for community involvement.

The community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.		**Transparent**	We will be clear in our communication to the community as to scope and objectives and the community's influence on the outcome. We will allocate sufficient time for the review of information and participation in engagement activities. We will endeavour to have clear marketing and visibility of the opportunities for participation. We will provide feedback to the community in a timely manner.
Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.	**Accessible**	We will use a variety of methods and engagement platforms - online, print and face-to-face methods to maximise our reach for deliberative engagement and to remove potential barriers to participation. We will reach out to our community to invite their involvement and to hear from affected and interested groups. We will provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand. We will endeavour to be inclusive and make our community feel welcome to participate and contribute through our communication, in the selection of locations, tools and methods of engagement.
		Equitable and inclusive	We will identify early the people and groups likely to be affected by our decision and ensure they have opportunities for equitable and inclusive participation. We will address physical, social, geographical cultural and technological barriers to participation. We will empower stakeholders with relevant, objective and plain English information and resources to allow informed participation.
Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.	Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.	**Representative**	We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process. We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement. We will actively seek the views of the whole community and design our engagement activities to be inclusive of our demographics.

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		Flexible Section 55 (2) (e)	We will adapt our Engagement approach to meet evolving circumstances, including allowing for newly identified stakeholders to engage as necessary throughout the process. We will offer a range of engagement opportunities and methods and tools to allow community to participate in a way that is convenient and accessible for them.
Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.	Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.	**Collaborative**	We will share information with community and ask that they share information with Council to develop a shared understanding to enable collaboration. We will provide opportunities for collaboration with community to determine sustainable solutions to complex local issues.
	Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.	**Influence**	We will advocate on behalf of the community where the work of external agencies (including other tiers of government) impacts our community. We will actively seek input from community members on their opinions, needs and interests to inform Council decision making.
	Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.	**Accountable Section 55 (2) (g)**	We will inform participants of the level of influence they will have in a decision making process, and we will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made. We will report back to the community in a timely manner, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did. We will action decision outcomes in a timely manner. Accountability is a key requirement in the preparation of a community engagement plan.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Role of the Mayor

The role of the Mayor is to:

- Be a champion for the Council's Community Engagement activities.

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6.2 Role of the Councillor

The role of every Councillor is to:

- Actively promote opportunities for community to participate in engagement activities.
- Encourage community to represent their needs and interests to Council so as to inform the decision making process.

In performing the role of a Councillor, a Councillor must:

- Consider the diversity of interests and needs of the municipal community.
- Although not specified in the Act Councillors are encouraged to:
    - Actively participate in engagement processes mandated by the Act; and
    - Undertake all engagement activities in accordance with the Engagement Policy.

6.2 Functions of the Chief Executive Officer

The role of the CEO is to:

- Lead the organisation to embed and sustain a positive, proactive attitude towards a best practice culture through support and encouragement of consistent high quality community engagement processes and outcomes.

6.4 Role of Executive Leadership Team

The role of the Senior Management Team is to:

- Apply better engagement practice through review of strategic documents against the Community Engagement Policy, Community Engagement Framework and Guide.
- Review evidence of engagement planning documentation.
- Lead each branch to create a strong community engagement culture that values engagement practice to support sustainable Council decision making processes.
- Value the time, budget and resources required for high-level engagement practice, through appropriate funding and resource allocation.
- Recognise, remove and/or mitigate internal barriers to engagement.

6.5 Managers/ Coordinators

The role of Managers and Coordinators is to:

- Endorse engagement plans developed and ensure the engagement activity level to be undertaken is appropriate and in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy.
- Value the time, budget and resources required for high-level engagement practice, through appropriate funding and resource allocation.
- Review post engagement evaluations and share the learning.

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- Provide reports to Council that openly and transparently reflect the findings of a community engagement processes.
- Consider community and internal feedback to identify priorities and resources for development of Business Plans.
- Ensure staff undertaking community engagement have adequate training and/ or have sought mentoring support.
- Ensure teams, committees, reference groups, contractors and volunteers are aware of the Community Engagement Policy, Community Engagement Framework and the Engagement Planning Guide and undertake all engagement in accordance with the Policy.

6.6 Staff

The role of all staff is to:

- Assess the requirement for community engagement.
- Register evidence into Content Manager to demonstrate assessment process has determined if community engagement is required or not required.
- Undertake the engagement planning process to determine the scope, context and level of engagement required. Engagement plans are to be developed in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy.
- Register engagement plans and supporting documents into Content Manager to evidence planning and community engagement undertaken.
- Seek peer support for plan development and implementation, if required.
- Seek Managerial support, and endorsement of engagement plan documentation.
- Embed evaluation, monitoring and review into the engagement planning.
- Close the communication loop – ensure results of engagement are feedback to all internal, external stakeholders and participants in a timely manner.

6.7 Community Engagement Officer

The role of the Community Engagement Officer is to:

- Build capacity of the organisation to further embed community engagement practice through the implementation of the Community Engagement strategy actions.
- Provide in house advice and guidance regarding best practice in community engagement.
- Support project teams to plan, develop and evaluate engagement programs.
- Initiate the review of the Community Engagement Policy every 4 years.

6.8 Community Development Team

The role of the Community Development Team is to:

- Provide peer support through mentoring and guidance regarding best practice in community engagement.

- Support project teams to plan, develop and evaluate engagement activities.
- Support the review of the Community Engagement Policy.

6.9 Marketing and Communications Unit

The role of the Marketing and Communications Unit is to:

- Support development and implementation of community engagement through strategic and coordinated communications.

7. Legislated Engagement Requirements – *Local Government Act 2020*

Councils Community Engagement requirements are divided into the following categories:

- Legislated engagement
- Non- legislated engagement.

Council has specific requirements to undertake engagement under the:

- Local Government Act 2020; and
- Other State and Federal Acts specifically referring to community engagement and/or public consultation.

In some instances, an Act will prescribe a minimum legislative requirement; in other instances an Act may refer to the requirements as stated in Council's Community Engagement Policy at a minimum.

Legislated Engagement requirements specified in the Act (Section 9 (2) (g); and Section 55 (1 & 2); and Section 56 and Section 57 are tabled below, in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy, legislated activity should be undertaken (as a minimum).

Community Engagement Planning must be undertaken to evidence planning and due consideration of community impact and the application of the Community Engagement Policy principles and values for each of the legislated requirements in the sections of the Act as set out in the policy.

Deliberative Engagement Council should also be aware of the specific requirement to deliberative engagement practices in the development of Council plans, documents, policies and procedures, and that all principles within this Policy should also be applied, where relevant. For example, financial management, public transparency, strategic planning and service performance deliberative engagement practice must also be considered.

7.1 Section 9 (2) (d) of the Act

One of the overarching governance principles of the Act states *"the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making".*

Section 55 (2) (g) refers to the type and form of engagement as being deliberative engagement. Council is required to include deliberative engagement practices for the sections in the table below:

Legislated – Deliberative Engagement requirements.

Topic	Section Reference
Community Vision	Section 88
Council Plan	Section 90
Financial Plan	Section 91
Asset plan	Section 92

Legislated – Engagement requirements.

Topic	Section Reference
Community Engagement Policy	Section 55
The Governance Rules	Section 60
Proposing a Local Law	Section 73
Preparation of Budget or Revised Budget	Section 96
Acquisition and Compensation	Section 112
Restriction on power to sell or exchange land	Section 114
Lease of land	Section 115

Non- legislated engagement
In addition to legislated engagement requirements Council may consider undertaking community engagement, when engagement could;

- **Inform Decisions:** by providing opportunities for the community to contribute to the decision making processes.
- **Build Capacity**: by educating the community on a specific theme or issue to increase knowledge or change behaviours.
- **Strengthening Relationships:** by building new relationships and/or improve relationships with the community.

When to Engage
Engagement should happen early in the planning stage for any changes to or in the development of new; services, facilities, policies, plans or local laws that impact our community, including Council's budget. Engagement may need to occur at several stages in the lead up to final plans or decisions. The greater the impact on the community, the more interactive the consultation will be. Where necessary we will conduct technical research and feasibility of options before seeking community input to ensure the community is appropriately informed.

Council's Non legislated engagement practice will be guided by the Principles, Core values and Council's practice statements in Table 1 of this Policy.

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Examples of non-legislated engagement could include but is not limited to:

1. *Targeted Policies, strategies and ' initiatives.*

This may include strategy development on issues that impact particular groups and/or areas and can also include positioning policies such e.g. Toilet Strategy, Public Open Space strategy.

2. *Service planning and operational matters.*

This includes activities undertaken to identify Community need and establish community interests in the discretionary services and day to day operational matters of Council, e.g. upgrades to local playgrounds.

How to Engage

Council's engagement planning process is guided by the IAP2 *Spectrum of Engagement* which describes five levels of engagement, from 'inform' through to 'empower'. It pairs up the role of the community with the level of influence they should expect to have. The spectrum is not intended to imply that participation can only be linear, that one type of participation should be completed before progressing to another. It is also not intended to suggest that some types of participation are better than others, or that only one level of participation, is appropriate for each process. Rather, many projects will involve more than one level of engagement at different stages of the process, or regarding different components of the project. This is because the community can have different levels of influence at different stages of the project and different groups within the community may be more directly impacted than others.

Community engagement involves a variety of engagement methods and communication techniques appropriate for the level of engagement and the needs of participants.

Table 4. Below describes the five levels of the spectrum and the roles of Council and community.

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Council's role...	EMPOWER	COLLABORATE	INVOLVE	CONSULT	INFORM
		DELIBERATION			
	Level 3				
			Level 2		
					Level 1
	Place the final decision-making in the hands of the public.	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	Working alongside the Community through multiple stages of a project to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision.	Two way communications designed to gain Community feedback on a particular issue / topic to assist in decision making.	One way communication providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding about something that is to happen or has happened, the alternatives, opportunities and/ or solutions.
Our promise to the Public.	We will implement what you decide.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influence the decision.	We will keep you informed.
Community will be given the opportunity to…	Act	Partner	Participate	Contribute	Listen
Example Techniques.	Citizen Juries Ballot Elections.	Citizen advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision- making.	Workshops Deliberative engagement polling.	Focus groups Surveys Public meetings.	Fact sheets Social media Newsletter.

Who to Engage

The breadth of activities for which we will engage with community and stakeholders is vast, therefore "who we engage" may vary from project to project. However, by undertaking Council's community engagement planning process underpinned by the (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation, and the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) Principles will ensure we consistently involve all representative persons (both internal and external) organisations and groups (stakeholders) affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

Monitoring Evaluation and Review

Council has integrated monitoring, evaluation and review points into our community engagement processes, highlighted in our Community Engagement Planning Model, the Community Engagement Planning Guide and Community Engagement template. The domains for evaluation include but are not limited to the plan, process, relationships, and outcomes.

Closing the communication loop

Communicating the findings or results back to the participants is as integral to the process as the planning. Communication of the results and findings validates the authenticity of the process and is imperative for maintaining the integrity of the trust relationship between Council and community. Community have the right to be informed of the decision and of the way/s their involvement has influenced or impacted the decision which has been made. Council's Community Engagement Planning Guide supports the selection of tools and techniques appropriate to meet the needs of the stakeholders and the engagement participants.

8. Definitions

Community Engagement	A planned process that allows for people who will be affected by a decision to contribute to the outcome through participation and communication with Council in the decision making process.
Public Participation	The term used by IAP2 to describe community engagement.
Engagement	The defining elements of engagement: planned, purposeful, interrelationship between Council, community and stakeholders.
Consultation	Consultation is one of the levels on the IAP2 Spectrum and is the level of engagement generally used for legislative engagement to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
Community	Community can refer to people who live in the Mildura Rural City Council municipality or: a) A Community of place based on a geographical location (residents of Merbein). b) Communities of practice based on common interests – gardening, bike riding. c) Communities of interest, i.e. Advisory to Council, ratepayers. d) Communities of identity – shared identity traditional owners of land in the municipal, age groups, language spoken, housing arrangements. e) People and bodies who conduct activities in the Mildura Rural City Council municipality (industry).
Stakeholder	A person, group or organisation with a level of involvement in an engagement process based on impact, interest or responsibility for an outcome. Stakeholder may be internal (Elected Members and staff) or external (community, organisations, NGO's, state government, other levels of government involved in a decision) Always includes internal technical experts, decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

Tools and Methods	The activities or techniques that can be used to engage i.e. surveys virtual meetings, forums, geographic tools, ideas boards. Methods are the way it's delivered – i.e. Online or in person, public meetings and community panels, public competitions or deliberative budgeting for example.
Engagement Planning	The logical process to designing community engagement to ensure appropriate timing, resources, tools and methods according to a considered analysis of those affected, impacted or interested and the scope of any engagement project.
Co-design	A collaborative project undertaken with community to develop an agreed model or design of service delivery or public infrastructure. Can also refer to the co-design of the engagement process itself to ensure it is fully transparent and works for all parties.
Deliberative Engagement	Deliberative engagement is an approach to decision-making that allows inclusive representation of people from a community to: • consider relevant information from multiple points of view • discuss the issues and options to develop a common understanding and; • develop their thinking together to frame recommendations to inform the decision making of the elected officials.

9. Legislation and other references

9.1 Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Defamation Act 2005*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Public Administration Act 2004* - requires the use of community views to improve outcomes.
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- Local Government Performance Reporting Framework
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Privacy Act 1988*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.*

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9.3 Documents

This policy is implemented in conjunction with the following documents:

- Mildura Rural City Council Plan 2017 – 2021
- Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024
- Community Engagement Framework
- Community Engagement planning Guidelines including the Community Engagement Plan Template
- Customer Service Strategy
- Community Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Integrated Marketing and Communications Strategy
- Social Inclusion Policy CP019
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan
- Local Laws
- Governance Rules
- Budget Policy Development.

9.4 Engagement Resources

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation.*
- The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) *Public Participation Principles.*
- *Victorian Local Government Act 2020.*

9.5 Risk Assessment Reference

Please tick the corporate governance risk(s) that this policy is addressing.

Risk Category	*Tick*	**Risk Category**	*Tick*
Asset Management	√	Human Resource Management	
Committees		Leadership & Organisational Culture	√
Compliance – Legal & Regulatory	√	Occupational Health & Safety	
Contract Management		Organisational Risk Management	
Contract Tendering & Procurement		Project Management	
Corporate Governance	√	Public Image and Reputation	√
Environmental Sustainability			

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14.2 MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN 2020-2025

Summary

The purpose of this report is to present the draft Municipal Early Years Plan 2020-2025 for adoption.

2021/0007

Moved: **Cr Jodi Reynolds**
Seconded: **Cr Ian Arney**

That Council adopt the draft Municipal Early Years Plan 2020-2025 as presented.

CARRIED

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Municipal Early Years Plan 2020-2025

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Mildura Rural City Council

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Photo By Dianne Thatcher

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Mildura Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land which now comprise the Mildura Rural City municipality. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate and respect their continuing culture and acknowledge the memories of their ancestors.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

There are almost 7,000 children aged 0-9 years in the Mildura Rural City Council local government area. Unlike many other regional communities, our population of young people and young families is growing, with over 700 babies born every year.

Our municipality has a proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and a rich association to the culture and heritage of the First Peoples. It is a vibrant multicultural community with 79 different nationalities officially recognised. It is also blessed with many community groups who work together to make sure all our children and families are supported to have the best start in life.

Our community's future lies with our children. More than any other time, early childhood shapes who our children will become and what kind of life they will lead. During the early years, a child's brain is developing faster than at any other time of life. The foundations are being laid for children's optimal development. This starts in early childhood and then influences how children perform at school, as young people, as adults and as future leaders and active citizens.

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2020 – 2025 is a guide for Council to work with its community partners for, and with, children and families from birth through to eight years. It places a focus on strengthening families and on creating a community in which children and their families can thrive.

All parents want to give their children the best start in life. We know that our families want their children to be happy and healthy. They want them to learn and grow so they can live fulfilling and productive lives.

We want this for Mildura's children too and hope that this Municipal Early Years Plan helps to achieve this.

I would like to thank our community partners, children, families and staff who worked collaboratively together to develop our Municipal Early Years Plan 2020-2025.

Sarah Philpott
Chief Executive Officer

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MILDURA RURAL CITY COUNCIL MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN: ENDORSEMENT BY PARTNERS

We, the undersigned, on behalf of our respective departments and organisations, endorse the Mildura Rural City Council Municipal Early Years Plan, 2020-2025. We endorse the Vision, Operating Principles, Priorities, Goals and Strategies outlined in the Plan. The Municipal Early Years Plan will profile, and progress agreed key partnership work to improve outcomes for children and families and will be implemented through ongoing two year partnership Action Plans.

Name	Position	Organisation	Logo
Jane Maine	Area Executive Director Mallee	Department of Education and Training	
John Bridgfoot	Executive Director, Mallee Area	Department of Health and Human Services	
Jane McCracken	Executive Officer	Hands Up Mallee	
Christine Cottrell	Director	Little People Big Futures	
Rhonda Smith	Manager Early Years	Mallee Family Care	
Lyndal Munro	Director of Community Services	Mallee Track Health and Community Services	
Gary Simpson	Chief Executive Officer	MASP	
Jacqualyn Turfrey	Acting Chief Executive Officer	MDAS	
Alisi Fangaloka	Executive Officer	SMECC	
Simone Heald	Chief Executive Officer	Sunraysia Community Health Services	
Merinda Robertson	Manager	Zoe Support Australia	

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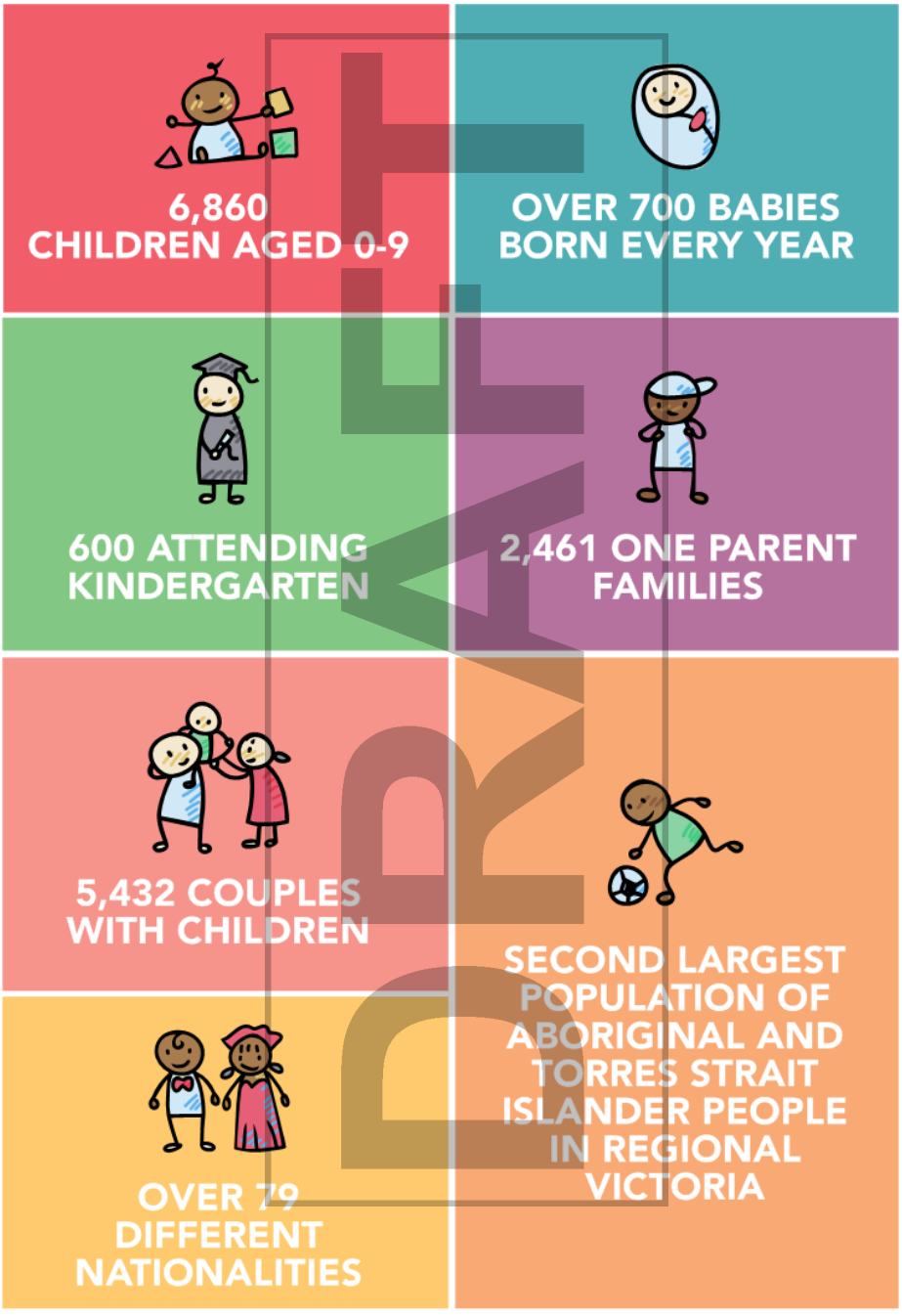
OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AT A GLANCE



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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Local Government Act 2020 aims to improve local government democracy, accountability and service delivery for all Victorians. It has at its core, the aim of ensuring that all Victorians can engage with their local council on local priorities and the future of their community. It is designed to support strategic planning, public transparency, service performance and financial management.

Mildura Rural City Council is legally required to develop a Community and Council Plan and a Community Health and Well-being Plan, which are aligned with but not duplicated by the Municipal Early Years Plan. Whilst municipal early years planning is not a requirement of councils, Mildura Rural City Council has undertaken planning for its children and families over many years. This Municipal Early Years Plan aligns with the Community and Council Plan 2017-2021 and its vision: "We will create a safe, supportive place to live, where diversity and lifestyle opportunities are enhanced". It is consistent with the Community Health and Well-being Plan 2017-2021 as well as the principles outlined in the Local Government Act 2020.

This Municipal Early Years Plan outlines a framework and strategies to guide Council, in working with its community partners for, and with children and families from birth through to 8 years. It is mindful of the changing needs of children and their families along the life course, beginning with antenatal care, infancy through early childhood, the middle years, adolescence and young adulthood. It also recognises that the well-being of children is influenced by their family and community context. By taking an ecological approach, the Plan places a focus on strengthening families and on creating a community in which children and their families can thrive.

Mildura Rural City Council, as the tier of government that is closest to its people, is well positioned to work with the community and other levels of government to enhance liveability of the municipality for children and their families.

OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH

Mildura Rural City Council plays a range of roles, and works alongside many local partners and government departments, to create a community context in which children and their families can reach their full potential and actively participate in community life.

Council provides early childhood health and learning services such as Maternal and Child Health, Kindergarten Central Enrolment, Childcare, Supported Playgroups, Best Start, Libraries, Playgrounds and open spaces where children and their families can play, learn and connect with community and each other. Council plans and provides early childhood facilities, arts, cultural and recreation centres, swimming pools and sporting facilities.

Council builds community capacity through supporting voluntary organisations working with children and families and leading on issues impacting on them such as gender equity and preventing family violence. Council undertakes precinct planning and local area planning for the benefit of children and families. It advocates to governments on behalf of its residents on issues directly related to children. It participates at a regional level on "The Compact - Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years – A Compact between Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Local Government (represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)" 2017 – 2027 to work strategically at a high level on agreed state wide and regional priorities.

Council upholds and advocates for the rights of children as they are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and for Indigenous Peoples, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This Municipal Early Years Plan outlines principles, priorities, goals and strategies to support joint decision making around key community partnership work, program development and delivery, planning, partnerships and advocacy. It provides an overarching framework from which the Council Maternal and Child Health and Early Years teams can develop their action plans.

OUR PARTNERS IN EARLY YEARS PLANNING

Council recognises that there are many well developed partnerships in place across the municipality which influence a range of early years health and learning outcomes. This Municipal Early Years Plan provides an overarching Council framework to profile and progress agreed key partnership work to improve outcomes for children and families. It has been prepared in collaboration with our external partners. It could not have been developed without them and it can only be delivered with them. Our partnerships will inform, enrich and share effort to make the Plan outstanding and successful.

Council also recognises our children and families as key partners in this process. Two years of extensive consultation, through Hands Up Mallee, has enabled the voices of children and families to be clearly heard throughout this Municipal Early Years Plan.

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND SYSTEMS APPROACH

An increasing emphasis is being placed on collective impact and systems approaches. A collective impact approach commits to a Common Agenda, established shared goals and measures of success, undertakes mutually reinforcing activities, ensures effective community participation and commits to ongoing communication between partners.

A systems approach offers the ability to think big about early years issues at a population level and by considering the various elements of the system, how they interact and the opportunities to influence and change the way the system operates.

HANDS UP MALLEE

The local Collective Impact initiative, Hands Up Mallee (HUM), aims to make long term social change that will improve the quality of people's lives and overall well-being of our community.

The initiative brings together diverse views and ideas from our community to identify the social issues that have the greatest impact on our long-term well-being and determine how best to address them.

It coordinates effort and resources across all sectors including non-profits, social services, business, communities, philanthropic and governments to improve the systems that serve us.

After two years of extensive research and consultation, in 2017, Hands Up Mallee announced our community's Common Agenda/Community Aspiration, to create long term change, with a vision of: "A connected community where families matter, and children thrive" and a focus on four key age groups:

- The First 1000 days (Pre-conception – 2 years of age);
- Best Start to Life (3-8 years of age);
- Young People Matter (9-14 years of age); and
- Tread your own path (15-25 years of age)

Our community identified that priority should be given to investing in our residents' early years. Prevention and intervention are critical to breaking existing cycles of social and economic disadvantage, and ultimately creating long term change. Parenting, play and home environments are critical elements to achieve this, directly influencing a child's development and health and well-being. Therefore, strengthening families is a focus of the Common Agenda.

People helping people is also to be a focus, where we aim to foster support for one another and look out for others around us.

The Municipal Early Years Plan has been developed to align with the collective impact work being undertaken by Hands Up Mallee. It commits to the same vision, focuses on the two first age groups – pre-conception to 8 years of age and places children and families firmly at the centre of its principles, priorities, strategies and goals.

In particular, Hands Up Mallee's role in supporting the implementation of the Municipal Early Years Plan will include working with community, services and 3 levels of government to strengthen place-based efforts to:

- Place the child and family at the centre and support the Rights of the Child;
- Support parents as first providers and teachers of their child;
- Use a systems approach to promote and direct change to improve prevention and early intervention;
- Improve service alignment and build a shared outcomes focus;
- Promote more strategic and aligned use of available funds to increase service access and availability;
- Improve service models and service collaboration to strengthen client-centred practice, and improve service access and availability; and
- Promote shared reflective practices to promote systemic change and strengthen the early years workforce.

The Municipal Early Years Plan raises the profile of key early years work being done by community partners and by Council across the municipality. It provides every resident and ratepayer with the opportunity to understand this work and to be informed of its progress.

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STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL ACTION

The Municipal Early Years Plan is strategically aligned to local action to deliver measurable impacts and change.

MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLANNING

There is significant evidence of the critical importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's development. Environments and experiences from conception to the end of a child's second year are significant for children's development. "Reducing inequities and ensuring the best start to life for everyone, irrespective of socio-economic status, race or gender, must be an ethical and economic imperative for all governments" (Moore et.al, 2017).

Research also tells us that the foundations for a child's long-term development are laid in early childhood. A child's environment and experiences in his or her early years set key pathways for life. Children's learning commences long before they enter school – children are born ready to learn. Each stage of brain development is cumulative and, consequently, children can enter school with clear differences in the cognitive and non-cognitive skills needed for school success.

Early childhood is particularly important for children who start from a position of disadvantage. If children start behind, they often stay behind. Currently, children living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas are more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than those from the most advantaged areas, and this gap is widening over time.

Parents play a critical role in shaping the future of their children and parenting factors have been linked to a wide range of child outcomes. Parenting helps to determine how the broader social environment influences a child's healthy development. Thus, supporting parents in their parenting role is being recognised as a powerful way of improving childhood well-being, health and educational outcomes, and ultimately reducing social disadvantage.

Municipal Early Years Planning fosters a whole-of-community, whole-of-system approach to building community strength and addressing the underlying causes of inequity and vulnerability of children and families. Municipal Early Years Plans are place-based with a focus on prevention, equity, health and long-term social and educational outcomes for children. Although they are not statutorily required, local government understands the importance of the early years and continues to formally embrace this through these plans.

Childhood is a stage of life where investment has the greatest return and opportunities to intervene have the greatest impacts. A municipality that has a focus on children is one that benefits all members of the community. Local, Commonwealth and State Government policy has increasingly recognised the importance of investing in the early years from birth to school entry. The importance of local government in leading local policies, developing and delivering programs and providing infrastructure that can influence the health, education and well-being of its younger population is also well recognised. In the early years local government continues to take a leadership role. This role is supported by strong community engagement and partnerships, which can create an effective local delivery system to improve the outcomes for children, whilst also delivering improved social and economic outcomes for the community. This partnership approach is supported by The Compact - Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years.

Municipal Early Years Planning supports a focus on encouraging a partnership approach, where all community partners can work towards shaping and focusing childhood as a distinct life stage and developing strategic alignments across Council and Community to achieve optimal health, development and well-being of children.

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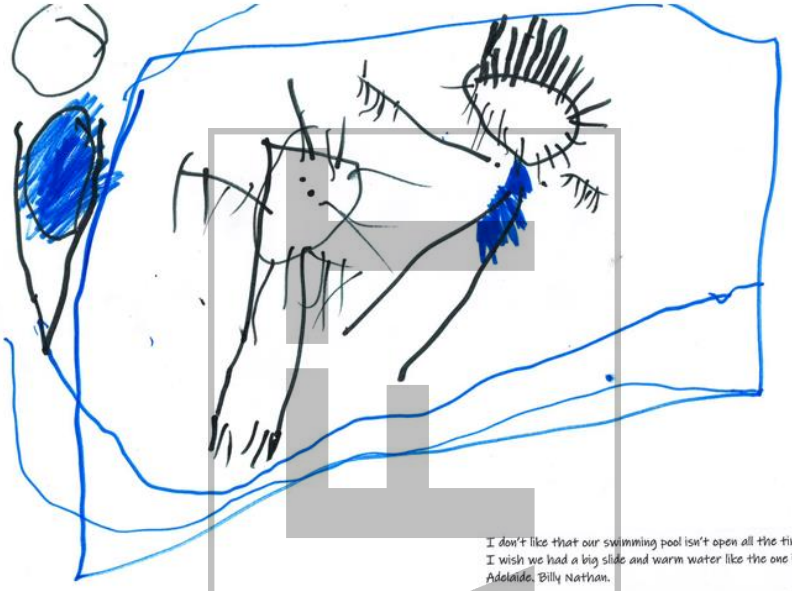
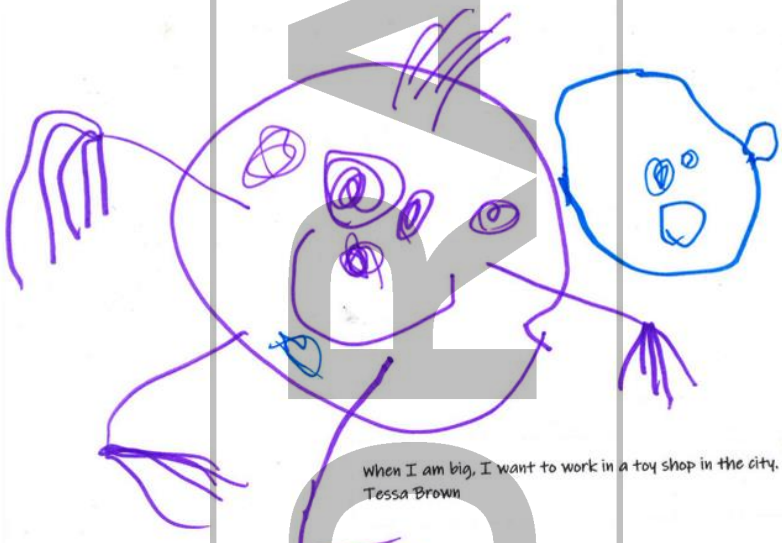
HOW THE MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN HAS BEEN INFORMED



I don't like that our swimming pool isn't open all the time. I wish we had a big slide and warm water like the one in Adelaide. Billy Nathan.



When I am big, I want to work in a toy shop in the city. Tessa Brown

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The Municipal Early Years Plan was developed through an analysis of international, national, state and local strategic early years planning, comprehensive data analysis from the Australian Early Development Census 2018 and the State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018, and engagement with a broad range of community members. Each stage of the engagement process included consultation and active feedback. A Municipal Early Years Plan Project Group was established to create a partnership approach to the development of the plan.

We have framed the Municipal Early Years Plan within the key state and commonwealth reforms including but not limited to:

- National: Universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten for children the year before school;
- Victoria: Early Childhood Reform Plan – Maternal and Child Health, School Readiness, the development of the Early Years Compact and a state-wide Kindergarten Central Enrolment Project;
- Victoria: Kindergarten Reform introducing subsidised kindergarten for three-year-old children by 2022;
- Victoria: Road Map to Reform – including the establishment of the Orange Door, strengthening communities to better prevent neglect and abuse, delivering early support to children and families at risk, keeping more families together through crisis, securing a better future for children who cannot live at home;
- Victoria: Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework, Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Reforms to enable information sharing in the best interests of the child; and
- Child Safety Legislation and Child Safe Standards - Organisations that provide services or facilities for children must implement Child Safe Standards to protect them from abuse.

We have also been informed by the extensive HUM work - Community Conversations, Voices of Children, and Systems Mapping

The Municipal Early Years Plan builds on the successes of our previous Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018, and the Evaluation of that plan, including but not limited to:

- the establishment of our Community's collective impact initiative – Hands Up Mallee
- the development and implementation of the Kindergarten Central Enrolment Scheme
- the initial continuous improvement cycles to capture valid Kindergarten attendance data
- the implementation and growth of the literacy initiative facilitated by Mallee Family Care
- the expansion and increased choice in Supported Playgroup Programs facilitated by qualified staff
- Increased participation in Maternal and Child Health

It also builds on the first phase of the Early Childhood Strategic Evaluation, Mildura Community Report of the Early Childhood Reform initiatives led by Department of Education and Training which identified:

- MCH consultations have increased opportunity to provide greater support to families experiencing vulnerability
- 90-95% of kindergartens were on track in achieving the goals set out in their School Readiness Annual Plans
- Workforce attraction and retention is a substantial issue
- Increased referrals from Parents Next leading to demand in Supported Playgroups
- Parents expressing that the support they have received through Supported Playgroups has improved their parenting skills and confidence.

The Municipal Early Years Plan is based upon an evidence-based framework developed by the Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) – the Nest Agenda.

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THE NEST AGENDA

The Nest Agenda is the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) framework for improving the well-being of Australian children. It identifies six interrelated components of a child's life that need to be "going well" for their opportunities and positive trajectories to be maximised. It builds on existing frameworks and programs and bridges the critical gaps between them. It is based on the understanding that governments alone cannot meet all the needs of young people – and the significant issues facing young Australians cannot be improved by one 'magic' program, one policy, or one organisation working in isolation.

1. Positive sense of culture and identity
Having a positive sense of culture and identity is central to the well-being of children and youth and is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and youth. This outcome includes having a sense of spiritual well-being. It underpins and is fundamental to the other Nest child and youth outcomes areas, with appropriate measures of a sense of culture and identity to be developed.

2. Being loved and safe
Being loved and safe embraces positive family relationships and connections with others, along with personal and community safety. Children and youth who are loved and safe are confident, have a strong sense of self-identity, and have high self-esteem. They form secure attachments, have pro-social peer connections, and positive adult role models or mentors are present in their life. Children and youth who are loved and safe are resilient: they can withstand life's challenges and respond constructively to setbacks and unanticipated events.

3. Having material basics
Children and youth who have material basics have access to the things they need to live a 'normal life'. They live in adequate and stable housing, with adequate clothing, healthy food, and clean water, and the materials they need to participate in education and training pathways.

4. Being healthy
Healthy children and youth have their physical, developmental, psychosocial and mental health needs met. They achieve their optimal developmental trajectories. They have access to services to support their growth and development and have access to preventative measures to redress any emerging health or developmental concerns.

5. Engaged in learning
Learning is a continuous process throughout life. Children and youth learn through a variety of formal and informal experiences within the classroom and more broadly in their home and in the community. Children and youth who are learning participate in and experience education that enables them to reach their full potential and maximise their life opportunities.

6. Participating
Participating includes involvement with peers and the community, being able to have a voice and say on matters and, increasingly, access to technology for social connections. In practice, participating means children and youth are supported in expressing their views, their views are considered, and they are involved in decision-making processes that affect them.

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OPERATING PRINCIPLES: TO ENSURE OUR COMMUNITY WORK IS EFFECTIVE

We have developed the following principles to guide how we approach the Municipal Early Years Plan:

A commitment to the child at the centre
We need to start from the perspective of the whole child, focusing on what is required to ensure their overall well-being across all the dimensions of their lives, rather than planning within established professional disciplines and service boundaries.

A commitment to privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and knowledge
We need to recognise that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is well placed to determine the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We must privilege local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and self-determination when developing agendas and delivering services.

Families are the child's first educator
We need to recognise that parents, families and carers are a child's first and most important teacher. No amount of formal teaching can compare to the influences families have on their children, who they teach every day – by word and example. Children thrive when parents have the support they need.

A commitment to a long-term, evidence-informed approach
We need a movement away from policy short-termism and adopt a 'long-term' view. There is no 'quick-fix' for some of the complex issues facing our children and we will need to monitor, review, report and communicate effectively on our long-term progress, based on reliable data sources.

A commitment to social inclusion and equity
We need to ensure our community and its services are inclusive of all children and their families so they feel they belong, are socially connected, and can access the services they need. This means that we respect and welcome multicultural diversity, and understand what families value and give cultural priority to. We will value the strength in diversity of families and individuals. Will we also be proactive in addressing gender equity, systemic and structural inequalities and unconscious bias. We need to ensure our approaches serve to close the equity gaps so that all children enjoy a best start in life.

A commitment to prevention and early intervention
While tertiary action will always be required, evidence points to the maximum benefits being achieved by shifting our efforts towards preventing problems and intervening early.

A commitment to a life-stage approach
Our responses and interventions must also be appropriately distributed along the age continuum of childhood, knowing the greatest impacts are as early as possible in the life course. The system should also recognise that children move through 'life-stage' transitions in different ways and at different ages.

A commitment to systemic change using an outcomes approach
We need agreement to work toward a shared vision and improved collaboration between child well-being agencies, professions, community and governments to align efforts and deliver mutually reinforcing activities. We need to use the shared outcomes framework that is provided by The Nest, in the ARACY Report Card: The well-being of young Australians.

Accountability: transparency, participation, evaluation and feedback
We need to use an accountability framework that provides a disciplined way of thinking and acting which communities can use to improve the lives of children, families and the community. We need to not just preference data, but also involve local knowledge, traditional knowledge, narrative/stories and community voice in tandem, in our decision-making processes, to help communities get beyond talking about problems to taking action to solve them. We need to start with ends (the results you want to achieve) and works backward, towards means (programs and actions).

Locally based, cross sector approach
We need to take a locally based approach to guide planning for the best outcomes for children and families - looking at, listening to, and engaging with community members who live, work and play in a locality to understand their needs and aspirations. We also need to ensure that a cross-sector approach is taken, where various local community groups can come together to collectively focus their expertise and resources on how those local needs and aspirations can be effectively met.

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"A connected community where families matter, and children thrive"
Photo by Mark Morgan

OUR VISION

In keeping with the collective impact approach, we have retained the HUM shared vision for our Municipal Early Years Plan

" A connected community where families matter, and children thrive"

PRIORITY AREAS

Working together, we have identified seven priority areas to work on - that will ultimately make a difference in "turning the curve" on the well-being of our children and families. These priorities are reflected in our goals, strategies and high-level actions as seen in the next section "Municipal Early Years Plan in Practice."

Our priorities are:

1. Valuing and learning from the local Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community
2. Supporting access for children to safe and secure housing
3. Improving capacity of all families to actively participate in community life
4. Improving the health of children in Kinship Care and Out of Home Care
5. Expanding places and spaces that are welcoming to children and families
6. Recognising, respecting and including all cultures
7. Improving developmental outcomes for every child.

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THE MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN IN PRACTICE

To ensure that work in the community is effective, the Municipal Early Years Plan adopts a systems approach to address children and family's needs and an optimal health and learning environment for all children. Community partners will be invited to join a Municipal Early Years Steering Group which will consist of internal and external stakeholders who play a pivotal role in improving population outcomes for children and families.

The Steering Group will underpin the Plan in practice, through a two-year action plan, review and reporting process.

The priorities, goals and strategies outlined in our Municipal Early Years Plan have been developed through understanding what our community, children and the data is telling us, and with extensive input from local service providers.

The Municipal Early Years Plan is closely aligned with Council's Municipal Health and Well Being Plan (MHWP). The MHWP includes many important early years health and well-being activities already being undertaken and reported on, so are not duplicated in this Plan. For example:

- Improve the food supply to the priority settings of Early Years Services, schools, workplaces and sporting clubs through targeted partnerships with suppliers and the Victorian Healthy Eating Advisory Service
- Increase participation rates for Maternal and Child Health services and immunisations for all
- Undertake a settings-based approach to the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity
- Continue to work towards an integrated community approach to reduce substantiated child maltreatments incidents.

The Municipal Early Years Plan will not address all children's health and learning issues in the municipality, or all the strategies identified to address them. Rather, it is our best effort to undertake achievable, innovative, collaborative work practices aimed at better improving developmental outcomes for our children, and empowering families and carers to succeed as their children's first and primary educator.

OUR PLAN OF ACTION: OVERARCHING STRATEGIES

The Steering Group will work in partnership strategically, to implement some overarching strategies across the life of the plan, including:

1. Continue to pursue reconciliation and reducing inequalities, alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, through Council's Reconciliation Action Plan and the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap
2. Utilise the Local Government/Department of Education and Training/Department of Health and Human Services Early Years Compact to:
   a. Strongly position council MEYP's as a regional priority
   b. Advocate for improved coordination and resources to all MCH services across the region
   c. Advocate for sufficient and equitable provision of early intervention services for children 0-8 across the whole municipality
   d. Strengthen the training, recruitment, support and retention of the early years workforce
   e. Advocate for prioritising investment, as a community, early in children's lives
3. Investigate the potential to develop a Middle Years Strategy
4. Support the work of Hands up Mallee and utilise the principles of Collective Impact to build "A connected community where families matter, and children thrive"

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NEST AREA 1: POSITIVE SENSE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

All children have a right to feel accepted and respected. This is a principle set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that children and their families can express their individuality and uniqueness; knowing where you come from, where you are, where you belong, that you are valued and have the capacity to choose where you are going. Culture is about being part of life – ideas, values, customs and behaviours.

The voices of our children

- ☑ I want to learn languages
- ☑ Children want to travel to other countries

"I don't like it when people are angry and hurt other people"

"I don't like it when people are sad or mean"

Community conversations

What do you love about living here?

- ☑ Cultural diversity
- ☑ Place based identity

What are some of the biggest issues the community is facing?

"Equity"

Data Snapshot

- ☑ High number of indigenous children
- ☑ More humanitarian arrivals
- ☑ Seventy-nine different cultures

- — Less acceptance of diverse cultures
- — More families isolated by Language
- — High number of indigenous one parent families

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories around the townships and areas within and surrounding the municipality dates back more than 40,000 years. Approximately four percent of the Mildura Local Government area residents are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, making the area home to the second largest population of Aboriginal people in regional Victoria. There are two Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP's). They are the First People of Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation who identify four Tribes in their RAP - The Latji, Ngintait, Nyeri and Wergaia Tribes. We also have the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation representing the Tribes of the Wotjobaluk peoples. This Municipal Early Years Plan acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and recognises the unique status of First Nations people, whose families have been their children's first educators for multitudes of generations.

Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain one of the most vulnerable groups in Australia, experiencing much higher rates of poverty, exclusion, discrimination and removal from their homes and cultures. This reflects serious systemic denial of human rights and intergenerational trauma requiring targeted, strengths-based measures that redress the causes behind these problems.

To accelerate improvements in life outcomes, programs and services need to be designed, developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have called for a community-led, strengths-based approach, one that values their experience. In 2019, the Council of Australian Governments, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and the Australian Local Government Association signed a Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap and established a Joint Council on Closing the Gap. Council is consequently a partner to meeting Closing the Gap targets.

The Municipal Early Years Plan commits to support an early intervention approach to contribute to strong, healthy, self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are connected to family and culture. High quality early education holds great potential for improved outcomes for our children. Our Municipal Early Years Plan works towards supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services in the municipality that offer a unique type of support for children and families that is culturally grounded, holistic and responsive.

Mildura is also home to a rich, culturally diverse community, with over 70 different nationalities represented locally. With a high number of humanitarian arrivals, Mildura Rural City Council is an official Refugee Welcome Zone - where the community commits to welcoming and supporting refugees.

Children and families embody and experience this diversity in a multitude of forms – including ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual identity, living with a disability and socio- economic status.

The Municipal Early Years Plan is a call to action to acknowledge and value our diverse and multicultural community. In diversity is strength, and actions need to create better access and inclusion for all. Families feel more welcomed in professional settings when their culture and child rearing practices are respected. The plan acknowledges the skills our culturally diverse people bring with them, the social contributions they make to enrich our lives in so many areas, and their role as their children's first and primary educator.

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OUR PLAN OF ACTION: POSITIVE SENSE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Our goals:

- Strong, healthy, self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connected to family and culture
- Children build their sense of identity through belonging to people, place and culture

Our priorities:

- Valuing and learning from the local Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities
- Recognising, respecting and including all cultures

Strategy:

- Continue to provide a strengths-based wrap around model that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers and their children from conception to school entry
- Enhance the capacity of early years settings to effectively provide access to and cater for the diversity of multicultural children and their families

Related Council Plans and Strategies:
Reconciliation Action Plan, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognitinon Policy, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards Policy, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

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NEST AREA 2: BEING LOVED AND SAFE

All children have a right to grow up in loving and safe environments. Children are vulnerable and if the right caring environments are not there, they face many more risks and challenges than children who are nurtured, supported and encouraged to meet their potential.

The voices of our children

- ☑ "I like my sister helping me to do make up"
- ☑ "I like to ride my bike fast down the street with mum"
- ☑ "I like to be home inside"
- ☑ "I like to be home outside"
- — "I don't like it when people are angry and hurt other people"
- — "I don't like it when people are sad or mean"

Community conversations

What do you love about living here?

- ☑ Sense of community
- ☑ Social life

What are your hopes for you, your family and community?

- ☑ Safety

What are some of the biggest issues the community is facing?

- — Safety

What do you think is causing this issue?

- — Bullying and harassment
- — Family violence

What can we do to make a difference?

- ☑ Reduce family violence
- ☑ Improve policing and justice
- ☑ Increase public safety

Data Snapshot

- — Improving social competence over time
- ☑ Increasing levels of social and emotional vulnerability
- ☑ More families feel unsafe walking alone
- ☑ More children are victims of crime
- ☑ More children are less safe at home

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HOW ARE WE DOING WITH BEING LOVED AND SAFE?

The community consultation work through Hands Up Mallee, the data from the State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018 and the Australian Early Development Census results 2018, indicate more challenges than strengths in this component of children's well-being.

The aspirations of the community through community conversations reveal that families want to live in a safe community, and they want to reduce family violence, bullying and harassment.

Children value time spent at home with their families, visiting their grandparents and relatives. They aspire to a life of happy family relationships and living in clean, safe homes- just enjoying regular home routines.

The challenges to having a safe, secure and nurturing home environment in Mildura cannot be underestimated. The data in Table 1 shows us that we have concerning numbers of children experiencing family violence and children in Out of Home Care. Table 2 shows us that across the municipality, we have an increasing number of children developmentally at risk in social competence, compared with our Victorian counterparts - and some concerning spikes in vulnerability in Mildura and Red Cliffs.

There is a wide range of services and programs offered to support positive role modelling for families – such as Supported Playgroups and the Family and Community Hubs at MDAS and Sunraysia Community Health Services. Working against this is the ongoing inter-generational disadvantage some families in our community experience, which makes it hard for them to create a safe, loving environment for their children.

A key principle for our Municipal Early Years Plan is a commitment to the family's role as their child's first educator. If our community understands the importance of children living in safe, secure homes we can help them have the best start in life. If we make our early learning, health and family services easy to access and friendly to use for families experiencing complexities – children can thrive because their families have their needs met.

Table 1: Safety of children, State of Mildura Rural City Report, 2018

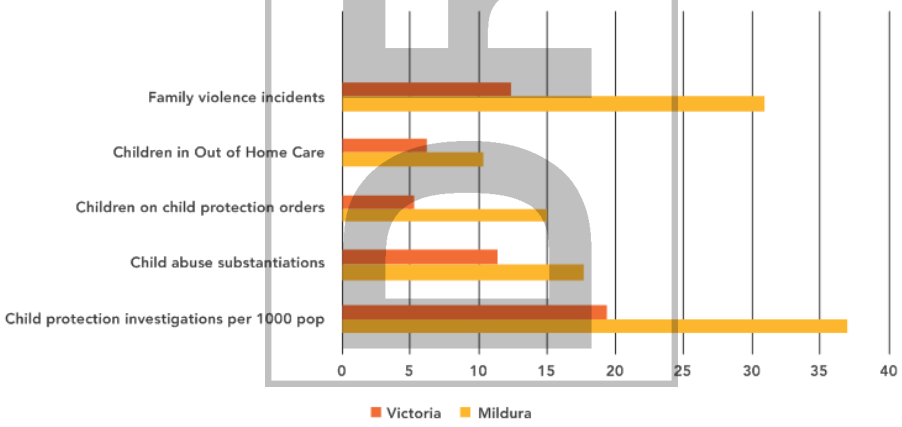

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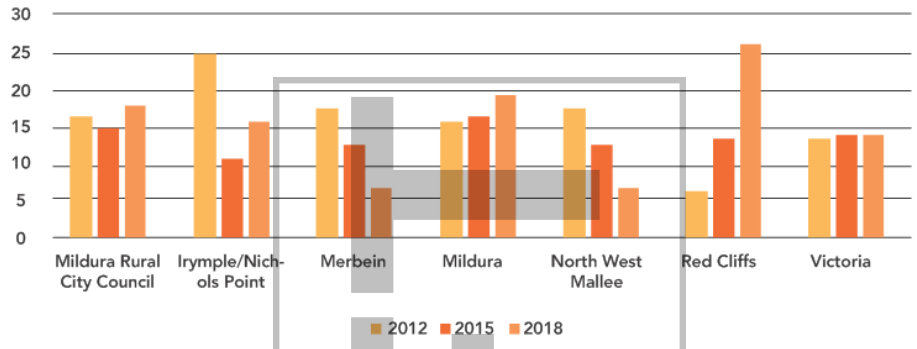
Table 2: Development at risk in social competence, AEDC 2018



OUR PLAN OF ACTION: BEING LOVED AND SAFE

Our goal: Children live in safe and supportive homes, with positive and secure relationships

Our priority: Supporting access for children to safe and secure housing

Strategy

- Connect families to housing options and integrated supports
- Strengthen the universal early learning platforms so they can engage and respond to children and their families who may be experiencing complexities along their life journey
- Embed family centred co-design to strengthen service response at the tertiary level so that all vulnerable children and families have every opportunity to access and remain engaged with early years' programs
- Improve the local understanding and application of Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework, Child Information Sharing and Family Violence Information Sharing legislation.
- Building strong partnerships between services to increase referral pathways to access family support and prevention programs to reduce escalating risk issues.

Related Council Plans and Strategies:

Reconciliation Action Plan, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

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Photo by Mark Morgan

NEST AREA 3: HAVING MATERIAL BASICS

Essential needs are those fundamental building blocks that every child needs to thrive. Having enough money to buy food, having a permanent house to live in with enough bedrooms, having a job and access to transport are all vitally important to families bringing up children.

The voices of our children

- ☑ "I like to stay home and relax"
- ☑ "I like to go shopping"
- ☑ "I would like to learn languages, go to High School, go to School"
- – "I wish there were more toys that don't cost money"
- – "I would like to have a bigger house"
- – "I would like a car to drive to hospital to visit mum"

Community conversations

What do you think are the biggest issues facing this community?

- – Vulnerable families with little or no prevention or education support
- – Financially disadvantaged families not able to afford childcare and kindergarten

What can we do to make a difference?

- ☑ More programs working with parents to support them
- ☑ Early years hub that focuses on health and education
- ☑ Foster relationships between early education and families
- ☑ Increase public safety

Data Snapshot

- ☑ Reasonable house prices
- ☑ High access to bulk billed medical services
- – Low home purchase stress
- – Low median income
- – More families run out of food
- – High number of jobless families
- – More long-term unemployment
- – Low education attainment of mothers
- – High social and economic disadvantage
- – High rental stress for families
- – Low availability of properties to rent

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HOW ARE WE DOING WITH HAVING MATERIAL BASICS?

The community consultation work through Hands Up Mallee and the data from State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018 again indicates more challenges, but some strengths in this component of children's well-being.

Families have better access to bulk billed GP attendances. Whilst housing is affordable for some families, there are still many who suffer rental stress. Concerningly, there is a high proportion of families who struggle to put food on the table. Mildura children live in families with lower family incomes and with less access to education and employment.

Parents, caregivers and family life have the biggest influence on children. Employment, secure housing, access to transport and sufficient income are all factors in supporting families to have the essential basics they need to provide for their children. If families struggle to find appropriate stable housing, employment, or are unable to provide their children with nutritious meal, they can find it hard to deal with other issues – such as looking after their own emotional and physical well-being and that of their children. There are many non-government and government agencies in the community who support families to find housing, work and other essentials. However, Governments invest short term - according to their political cycle. Often their resources, solutions and policy do not meet family's basic needs.

Table 3: Not all basic needs can be met - State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018

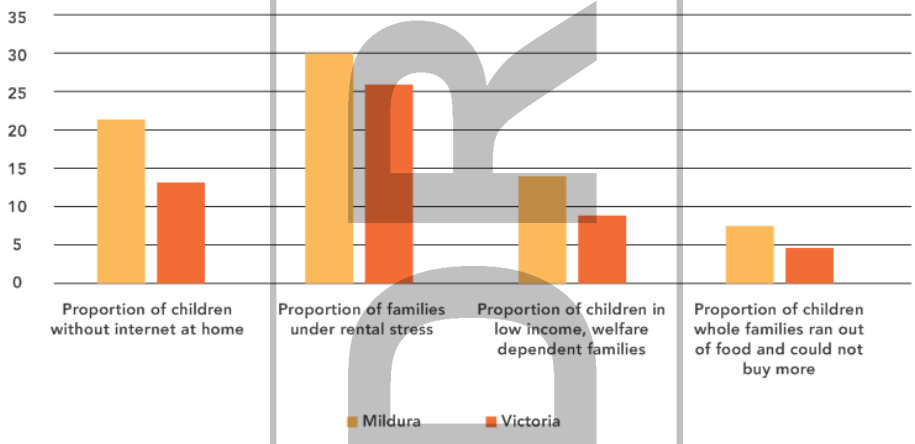
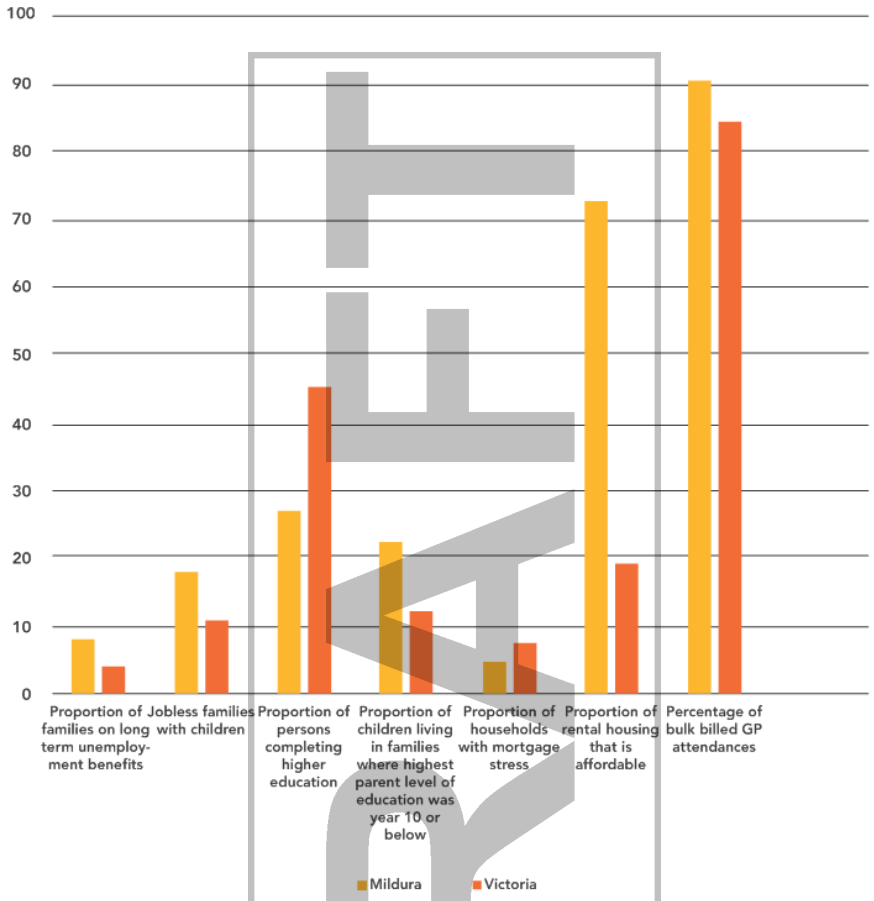


Table 4: Education and employment status - State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018



OUR PLAN OF ACTION: HAVING MATERIAL BASICS

Our goal: Education and workforce participation help families provide for their needs

Our priority: Improve capacity of all families to actively participate in community life

Strategy:

- Promote opportunities to better link families to pre-employment and study
- Increase access to early childhood education and care so families can participate in further education and employment

Related Council Plans and Strategies:

Reconciliation Action Plan, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

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NEST AREA 4: BEING HEALTHY

Our children are our future. Being physically, mentally and emotionally well is important for everyone, but for our children; starting out in life being healthy sets them up for a strong future.

The voices of our children

- ☑ Children love active play and being outdoors
- ☑ Children love treats, healthy food and going to eateries
- ☑ Some like to go to health services
- ☑ Children aspire to be a Doctor, a Midwife, a Nurse "like my mum"
- ☑ "I have to grow up by eating all my veggies, then going to school"

- — "I want to stay at home not go to school when I feel sick"
- — Some don't like to go to the Doctor, Hospital, Dentist or the Bush Nurse "Because of getting injections"

Community conversations

What do you love about living here?

- ☑ Country lifestyle
- ☑ Sense of community

What are your hopes for you, your family and community?

- ☑ Affordable and accessible education

What do you think are the biggest issues facing this community?

- — Health and well being
- — Mental health
- — Substance abuse and addictions

Data Snapshot

- ☑ Relatively high rates of MCH participation
- ☑ High proportion of children eat fruit and vegetables
- ☑ Improving gross and fine motor skills

- — More children vulnerable in physical and health well being
- — High rates of smoking during pregnancy
- — High proportion of low weight babies
- — Low breastfeeding rates
- — Low rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending MCH
- — High number of MCH referrals for developmental reasons

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HOW ARE WE DOING BEING HEALTHY?

The community consultation work through Hands Up Mallee indicates that access to health services and having a healthy, active lifestyle are important to children and families. Children and families emphasised how they love outdoor play, enjoying Mildura's natural environment, open spaces and participating in sporting events – that are so connected to positive health and well-being, and building confidence in children.

Data from the State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018 and the AEDC 2018, indicate there are areas of strengths as well as areas of concern for the health of our children. We have improvements in the way children can use their fine and gross motor skills – essential for healthy active physical development and to develop literacy and numeracy skills in school – however still comparatively low compared with our Victorian counterparts. More families are attending their MCH key ages and stages visits and children are eating enough fruit and vegetables – essential for healthy childhood development.

However, Mildura children are still comparatively vulnerable in their physical and health well-being when they reach school, with increasing vulnerability in Irymple-Nichols Point, Red Cliffs and Mildura. The data indicates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders MCH participation rates in MCH key ages and stages visits is low. (However, Mallee District Aboriginal Service provides a Maternal and Child Health Service, with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients choosing to attend this service). We have comparatively higher rates of smoking through pregnancy, low weight babies and comparatively low breastfeeding rates.

Equipping children and families with the information and skills they need to make healthy choices and maintain a healthy lifestyle is an important preventative health measure. Building trust and collaboration between families and services empowers families to have greater knowledge of which services do what - so they can act to support their children. It also assists to build strong referral pathways so that any developmental delays can be picked up early. Health and well-being outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are positively influenced by cultural connection and self – determination. The health needs of children and their families from refugee backgrounds can be influenced by their experiences of "forced migration", trauma and disruption of health services – they may have complex physical and mental health issues arising from their pre-migration experiences, during their journey or after settlement in Australia.

Table 5: Health of our children - State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018

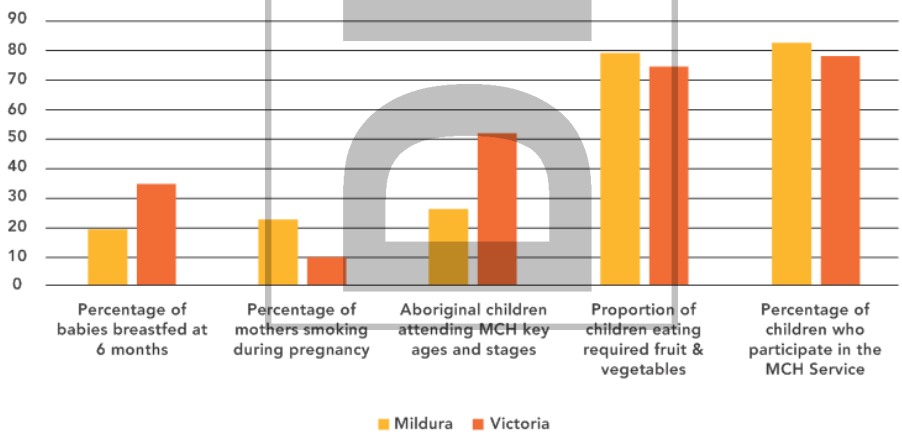
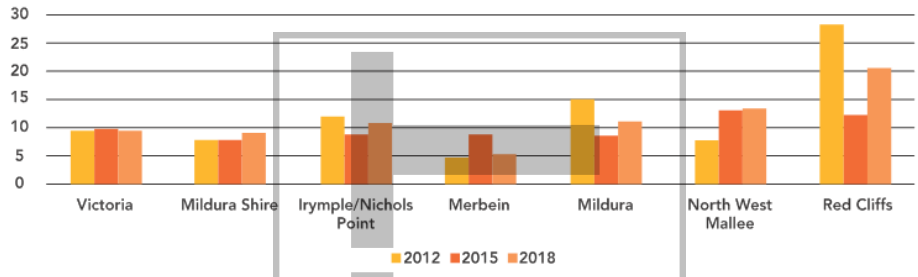


Table 6: Developmentally vulnerable in physical health and wellbeing, AEDC 2018



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OUR PLAN OF ACTION: BEING HEALTHY

Our goal: Confident families raise healthy, thriving children

Our priority: Improve the health of all children, prioritising those in kinship care and Out of Home Care

Strategy:

- Continue to explore new ways to increase participation in Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation
- Empower families to provide their children with the optimal health environment, commencing at pregnancy
- Improve child health support for Kinship Carers through the DHHS Kinship Care Model

Related Council Plans and Strategies:

Reconciliation Action Plan, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

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NEST AREA 5: ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Learning is a continuous process throughout life. Children learn through a variety of formal and informal experiences, and particularly through play. Families and carers are children's first and most important teachers.

The voices of our children

- ☑ Children love to develop their creativity and problem solving through imaginative play
- ☑ Children love family time, when dad tells stories about the bush or lets them help with farm machinery
- ☑ "I like to play at my house because there is a swing and a rainbow"
- ☑ Children have high career aspirations – to "save a burning house with people in it", "to mix two DNA's together and see what happens"
- ☑ "I would like a rocket to fly up in the sky!"
- — Some don't like to be left at preschool or day care

Community conversations

What do you think are the biggest issues facing this community?

- — Financially disadvantaged families not able to afford childcare and kindergarten
- — Engagement and attendance in education
- — Intergenerational disadvantage
- Lack of parent interest in education

What can we do to make a difference?

- ☑ Support our early years workforce
- ☑ Foster relationships between early education and families
- ☑ Give our children the best start in life
- ☑ Address affordability
- ☑ Expand book sharing
- ☑ Holistic approach to education
- ☑ "Get the first five years of a child's life right"

Data Snapshot

- ☑ Learning programs are increasing in quality
- ☑ Children are participating well in kindergarten
- ☑ Children are physically ready for school
- ☑ Good participation in Playgroups
- ☑ Good physical independence
- ☑ School readiness program is working well
- ☑ Well-developed motor skills
- — More children vulnerable in all five developmental domains
- — More children vulnerable on one, two and more domains
- — Increased vulnerability in Mildura and Red Cliffs

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HOW ARE WE DOING WITH ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING?

The community consultation work through Hands Up Mallee indicates that access to affordable early learning programs at a young age is very important to families. Promoting the importance of early childhood education and supporting and strengthening our early years workforce are also very important. Community acknowledge our workforce and early childhood service providers who are committed and skilled and have improved the quality of service delivery.

Children emphasised how they loved learning through play. They have high aspirations for their future as active participants in work, family and community life. They express an understanding that being healthy and participating in education are important building blocks to achieving their aspirations.

Data from the State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018 and the AEDC 2018, indicates there are some areas of strength but many areas of concern in how our children are developing. There is a positive overall improvement in children's fine and gross motor skills – essential in developing school readiness. Children are coming to school physically independent, and there is comparatively good attendance at kindergarten and playgroups.

However, there are no developmental areas where children in the Mildura municipality shine. There are developmental declines across the municipality and particularly in Red Cliffs, Mildura and Nichols Point. There is a significant and concerning increase in vulnerability across the municipality in the developmental areas of language/cognitive skills and emotional maturity.

There is still clearly a long way to go. Not all our children are ready for school when they begin Prep. When our children can move seamlessly from maternal and child health to playgroup, from playgroup to kindergarten, and from kindergarten to school - they have better ability to be engaged in their education. We need to leverage our work off the existing and new reforms, that will remain permanent in our local service system, to strengthen learning outcomes for all children, particularly our most vulnerable. This includes Maternal and Child Health, Kindergarten Central Enrolment, Supported Playgroups, Best Start, School Readiness Funding and the impending roll out of subsidised three-year-old kindergarten for all children.

When our local services are easy to access and welcoming, families can engage and continue to engage. Having culturally safe, aware, affordable, quality learning programs promotes better opportunities for our children to learn. Families embracing the value of early childhood education, and services embracing families and carers as children's first and main educators, are pivotal to turning the curve on positive developmental trajectories for children.

It is important to build workforce development strategies across disciplines, so that anyone with a role that faces families and children, is well supported and skilled to do this important work. Our region, located over 560 km's from the state capital, is geographically isolated. This makes it harder to attract and retain early years staff. When we can't access quality staff or training, the local workforce is negatively impacted. When we don't have enough staff, the capacity, or availability of services shrinks. Despite these local challenges, we are lucky to have passionate and knowledgeable staff in the early years.

Evidence shows that the best outcomes for children occur when support services are built into universal platforms. Skilling our workforce so they can identify, intervene and refer families early to supports - is critical to preventing developmental delays. Empowering staff to use the levers we have, is key to achieving optimal development outcomes.

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Table 7: Vunerability in two or more domains summary - AEDC 2018

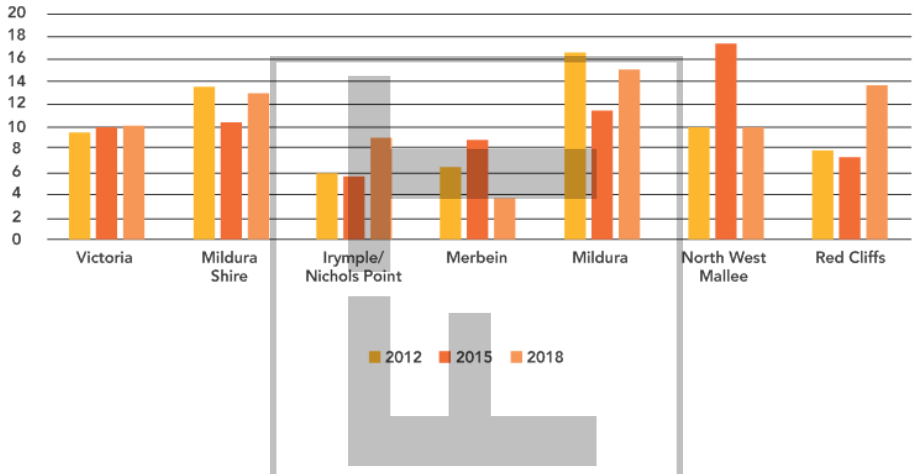

Table 8: Engaged in learning - State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018

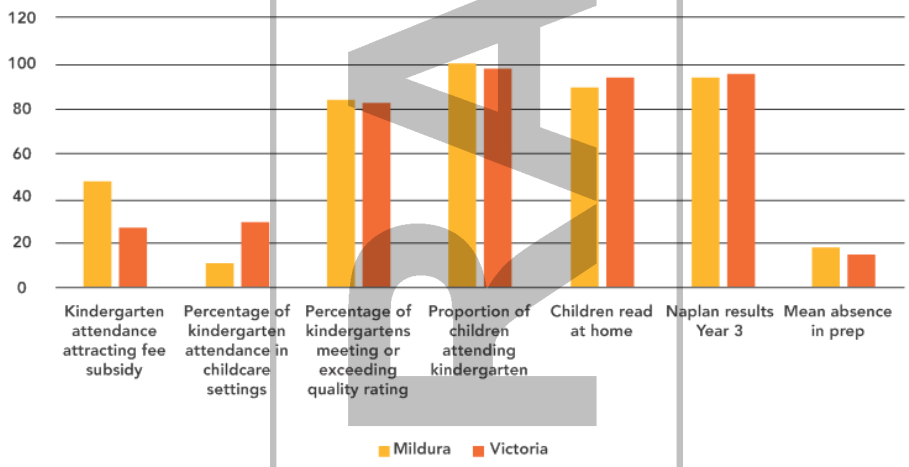

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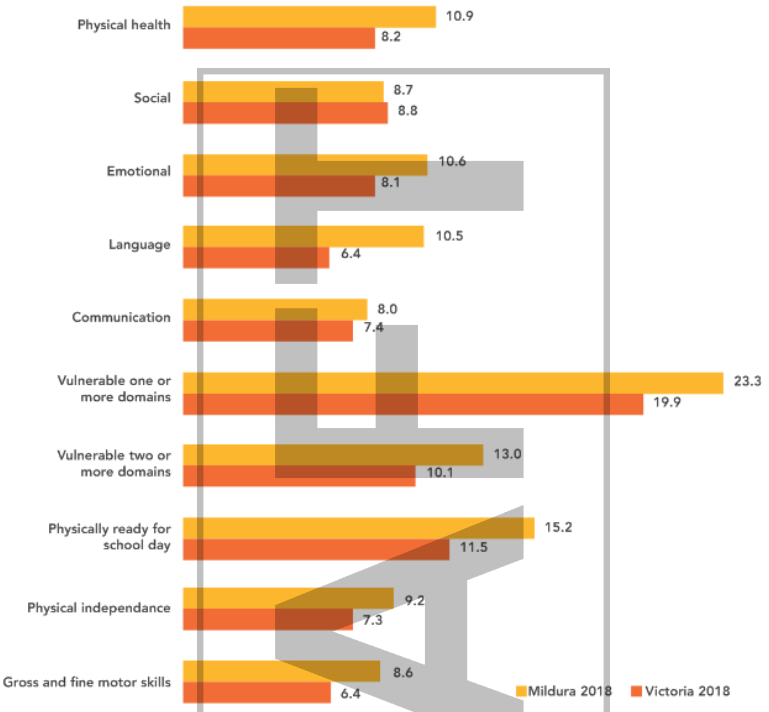
Table 9: Vulnerability in all development domains Mildura/Victoria - AEDC 2018



OUR PLAN OF ACTION: ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Our goal: All families are empowered to support their children to be involved and successful learners across childhood

Our priority: Improving developmental outcomes for every child

Strategy:

- Develop a comprehensive language and early years literacy strategy so that all children can progress from learning to read to reading to learn
- Co-designing approaches to enhance home learning environments with community
- Support all early childhood settings to be culturally safe and responsive
- Respond to participation gaps in early childhood programs to enable easy transitions across childhood
- Increase awareness of how Maternal and Child Health, Kindergarten, Childcare & Playgroups support children to reach their full potential
- Develop and adopt a principles-based approach to building the capacity of the workforce so that every child and family feels understood, valued and included

Related Council Strategies and Plans:

Reconciliation Action Plan, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards, Developing Playground Strategy, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

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Photo by Gina Babeth

NEST AREA 6: ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING

Participating includes opportunities to be involved with peers and the community, being able to have a voice and say on matters, and access to places, spaces and technology for social connections. Participating means children are supported in expressing their views, their views are considered, and they are involved in decision-making processes that affect them.

The voices of our children

- ☑ Children love to play games with friends such as "hide and seek or hunting bears in the forest:
- ☑ Children love playing and watching team sports such as football, soccer, netball, gymnastics and dance classes
- ☑ " The Easter egg hunt at the river where my mum took me – you had to find them and share them with people who missed out"
- ☑ Children love the natural environment

- – Some children don't like parks that bore them and some public toilets
- – Some children don't like noisy places "like inflatable world, the Aqua – coaster or the motor bike dirt track

Community conversations

What do you love about living here?

- ☑ Sense of community, social life and recreation

What do you think are the biggest issues facing this community?

- – Equality
- – Social responsibility

What do you think is causing these issues?

- – Social norms

What can we do to make a difference?

- ☑ Increase our social awareness
- ☑ Help others
- ☑ Participate in the community
- ☑ Increase our sense of community
- ☑ Practice social inclusion

Data Snapshot

- ☑ Learning programs are increasing in quality
- ☑ Children are participating well in kindergarten
- ☑ Children are physically ready for school
- ☑ Good participation in Playgroups
- ☑ Good physical independence
- ☑ School readiness program is working well
- ☑ Well-developed motor skills
- – More children vulnerable in all five areas of developmental
- – More children vulnerable on one, two and more domains
- – Increased vulnerability in Mildura and Red Cliffs
- – Low NAPLAN results in year 3
- – Less children read to at home

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HOW ARE WE DOING WITH ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING?

The community consultation work through Hands Up Mallee indicates that participation in community life is important to children and families. Community conversations reveal that the second most important thing families love about being here is their sense of community – with social life and recreation rating high. Families want their children to grow up with a sense of social responsibility and see this as one of the most important issues moving forward.

Children emphasised how they love to play with their friends – in team sports, in natural bush settings, in parks and playgrounds. They show clear ideas of how they want their community environment to be with ideas of cleanliness, beauty, fun, stimulation and imagination reflected in their voices.

Data from the State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018 and Early Childhood Development Census 2018 show many strengths to build on. Families and children feel more part of the community than their Victorian counterparts. They attend more civic events, are more part of organised groups and more involved in civic engagement.

There is a positive sign that overall, vulnerability in the developmental domain of social competency is reducing. Social competency is a key area that promotes confidence and civic engagement.

However, it is harder for some families to participate in community life – particularly if English is not their first language. Mildura has over 4,000 residents with a Non-English-speaking background, 690 of whom have arrived over the past two and a half years. For these families, settlement, transition and participation in community life is a journey that needs to be supported.

Community life has the power to add to our knowledge and resources, and to improve our everyday lives. Our community behaviour and values builds our social norms. These social norms help us to create a shared community vision and fuel public will. Children are part of our community. They have firm ideas about how they want to participate in community life. They express clear direction we should follow, when creating new and modifying existing spaces and facilities where children play and learn. They are never too young to contribute to our civic society, and to provide input into our planning processes, including our local community plans.

Table 10: Participation - State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018

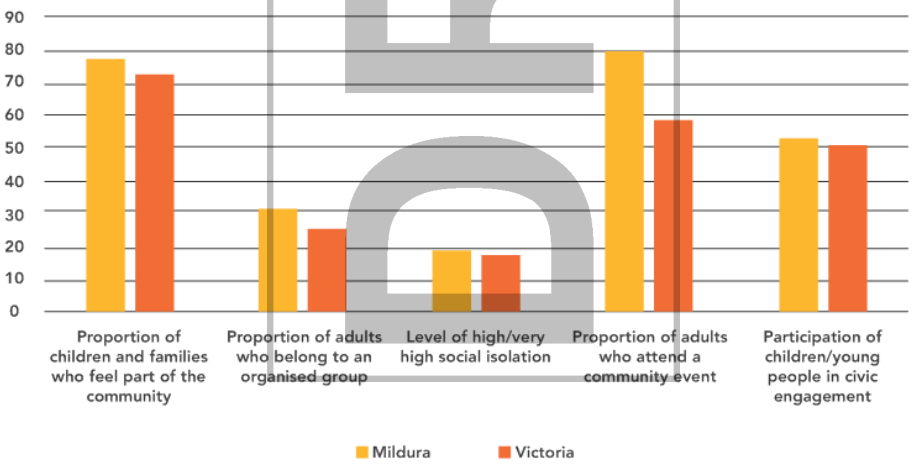
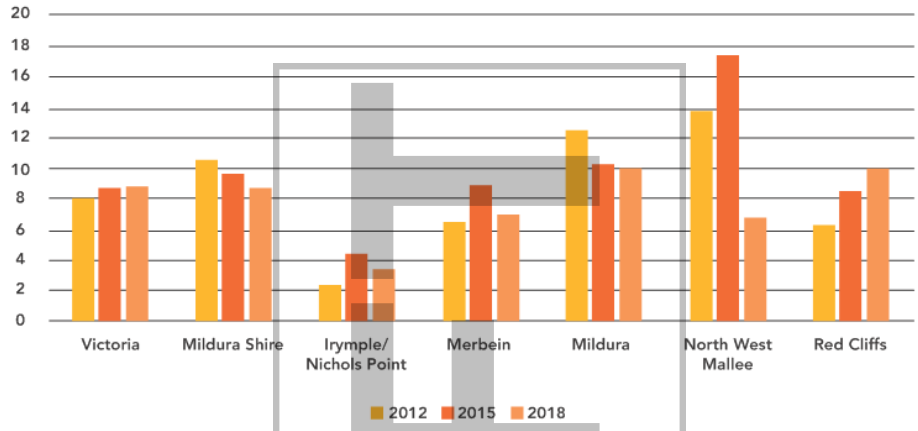


Chart 11: Development vulnerable in social competence - AEDC 2018



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OUR PLAN OF ACTION: ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING

Our goal: Community spaces are safe and welcoming to children and families

Our priority: Expanding places and spaces that are welcoming to children and families

Strategy:

- Continue supporting all diverse families to settle, engage and transition into work, learning and to actively participate in community life
- Advocate that all new infrastructure and renovations cater for the needs of children – child safe, accessible, welcoming and culturally appropriate
- Ensure children's voices are embedded into an infrastructure plan that promotes early childhood learning through play - across technology, facilities, playgrounds, natural, and open spaces to meet current and future need

Related Council Strategies and Plans:

Reconciliation Action Plan, Community Health and Well-being Plan, The Early Years Compact, Gender Equity Policy, Child Safe Standards, Developing Playground Strategy, LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan, Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

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Photo by Mark Morgan
www.mildura.vic.gov.au
Mildura Rural City Council

14.3 MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY CP049

Summary

Following the resolution to lay this matter on the table at the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 16 December 2020, an update on the status of this Policy Report is provided to Council.

2021/0008

Moved: Cr Helen Healy
Seconded: Cr Cyndi Power

That Council note the report continues to lay on the table until such time as an updated Media Relations Policy CP049 is finalised.

CARRIED

14.4 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MEETING 4/2020-2021 - MINUTES SUMMARY - 2 DECEMBER 2020

Summary

In line with the requirements of the Audit and Risk Committee Charter, the purpose of this report is to present to Council for noting a summary of the minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting 4/2020-2021. The confidential minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting 4/2020-2021, including key outcomes and recommendations of the meeting, have been distributed to Council under separate cover.

2021/0009

Moved: Cr Helen Healy
Seconded: Cr Glenn Milne

That Council note the confidential minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting 4/2020-2021 held on 2 December 2020.

CARRIED

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14.5 RESPONSE TO PETITION - ASH AVENUE, KOORLONG ROAD CONDITION

Summary

This report has been prepared in response to the petition received from Ash Avenue, Koorlong residents calling for Council to undertake maintenance to Ash Avenue and also requesting that the road be upgraded from an unsealed road to a sealed road.

The report outlines:

- the inspection and maintenance processes that council undertakes regarding unsealed roads as part of its obligations under the Municipal Road Management Plan (RMP);
- the background on the inspection and maintenance works undertaken on Ash Avenue prior to the receipt of this petition; and
- information on upgrading this road to a sealed road.

2021/0010

Moved: **Cr Ian Arney**
Seconded: **Cr Glenn Milne**

That Council:

(i) continue to undertake planned inspection and road maintenance works to Ash Avenue, Koorlong as per the requirements identified in the Road Management Plan; and

(ii) investigate any future funding opportunities for the upgrade of Ash Avenue, Koorlong to a sealed road based on the justification typically used for road upgrades but also in context with other priority roads within the municipality.

CARRIED

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14.6 USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAND FOR A DWELLING AND CREATION OF AN ACCESS TO A ROAD ZONE CATEGORY 1

Summary

Following the resolution to lay this matter on the table at the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 16 December 2020, this report is now represented as part of the January Ordinary Meeting of Council.

Date Received:	23 June 2020
Subject Property:	Wentworth Road YELTA (CA: 17 Sec: H Psh: MERBEIN)
Proposed Use/Development:	Use and development of the land for a dwelling and creation of an access to a Road Zone Category 1
Zone:	Farming Zone
Overlays:	Nil
Applicant:	Roy Costa Planning & Development
Application Triggers:	Clause 35.07-1 Section 2 use *Use of the land for a dwelling (less than 100 hectares outside of an irrigation district).* Clause 35.07-4 Buildings and works *A permit is required to construct or carry out works associated with a Section 2 use greater than 100m^2 in area.* Clause 52.29-2 Permit requirement *A permit is required to create or alter access to a road in a Road Zone Category 1.*
Relevant Provisions:	Clause 11.01-1S Settlement Clause 11.01-1R Settlement Loddon Mallee North Clause 11.03-6S Regional and Local Places Clause 14.01-1S Protection of agricultural land Clause 14.01-2S Sustainable agricultural use Clause 15.01-2S Building Design Clause 15.01-6S Design for rural areas Clause 16.01-5S Rural residential development Clause 16.01-5R Rural residential development – Loddon Mallee North Clause 21.06-1 Protection of rural land Clause 21.08-1 Agriculture Clause 35.07 Farming Zone Clause 52.29 Land adjacent to a Road Zone Category 1 Clause 65 Decision Guidelines
Objections Received:	Nil

The application seeks the approval for the use and development of a dwelling at Wentworth Road Yelta. The dwelling will consist of 4 bedrooms, ensuite, bathroom, theatre room, kitchen, meals, family, alfresco and double garage. The dwelling will be located 30m from the northern (side) boundary of the site and 62m from the western (rear) boundary of the site. This will position the proposed dwelling behind the existing illegal shed/dwelling on the site.

This site has been subject to a recent Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) enforcement order, including the removal of a number of existing illegal use and development on the site, including illegal access from the Road Zone (Calder Highway). This proceed to consent orders being agreed to by the applicant and the Responsible Authority in which the following was agreed to:

- Within ninety (90) days the restricted recreational facility, medical centre, outbuilding (so it cannot be used as a dwelling) and associated structures are decommissioned.
- Within one hundred and twenty (120) days cease using the subject land for a dwelling and decommission the unpermitted access to Calder Highway / Wentworth Road and remove all structures to return the land to predevelopment state.

The applicant has stated in the application that the site is unable to be returned to an agricultural production due to being unable to obtain a water licence and being cost prohibitive when considering the offsets required for native vegetation removal.

Moved: Cr Jodi Reynolds
Seconded: Cr Mark Eckel

That Council having caused notice of Planning Application No. 005.2020.00000092.001 to be given under Section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and having considered all the matters required under Section 60 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* decides to issue a Notice of Decision to Refuse to Grant a Permit under the provisions of Clause 35.07-1, Clause 35.07-4 and Clause 52.29-2 of the Mildura Planning Scheme in respect of the land known and described as Wentworth Road Yelta (C.A 17 Sec: H Psh: Merbein), for the use and development of the land for a dwelling and creation of an access to a Road Zone Category 1, for the following reasons:

(i) The proposal is inconsistent with the Planning Policy Framework in relation to agricultural land and rural development, specifically with Clauses 11.01-1S, 14.01-1S, 14.01-2S and 16.01-5S which seek to manage development in rural areas to protect and enhance agricultural production and avoid inappropriate rural residential development. The proposed dwelling does not seek to provide agricultural benefit and could limit the expansion of agriculture potential to the site by its approval.

(ii) The proposal is inconsistent with the Local Planning Policy in relation to agricultural land and rural development, specifically Clause 21.06-1 and Clause 21.08-1, which seek to ensure that new dwellings will assist in growing agricultural enterprise and to protect rural land for agriculture.

(iii) The proposal has failed to demonstrate it meets the purposes of the Farming Zone, which seeks to protect the land for agricultural activities.

(iv) The existing illegal use of the land for a dwelling has not resulted in any improvements on the land to seek to redevelop it for any agricultural use. Information regarding a water licence or offsets were only produced to receive approval for this application. It is considered that is has been an opportunistic way to ensure a permit is granted retrospectively.

LOST

2021/0011

Moved: Cr Glenn Milne
Seconded: Cr Liam Wood

That Council, having caused notice of Planning Application No. 005.2020.00000092.001 to be given under Section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, and having considered all the matters required under Section 60 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* decides to Grant a Permit under the provisions of Clauses 35.07-1 and 35.07-4 of the Mildura Planning Scheme in respect of the land known and described as 583 Wentworth Road YELTA, CA: 17 Sec: H Psh: MERBEIN for the use and development of a dwelling, in accordance with the endorsed plans, with the application dated 23 June 2020, subject to the following conditions:

(1) The use and development as shown on the endorsed plans must not be altered or modified without the prior written consent of the Responsible Authority.

(2) Within in three months of the issue of the Certificate of Occupancy for the dwelling approved under this permit, all other existing buildings located on the site must be decommissioned so that they cannot be used as a "dwelling" as defined in the Scheme to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

(3) Access to the dwelling must be provided via an all-weather road with dimensions adequate to accommodate emergency vehicles, to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

(4) The dwelling must be connected to a reticulated potable water supply or have an alternative potable water supply with adequate storage for domestic use as well as for firefighting purposes.

(5) The dwelling must be connected to a reticulated electricity supply or have an alternative energy source to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

(6) All stormwater runoff from the buildings and works must be retained onsite to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

(7) Prior to commencement of the use, amended plans must be submitted to and approved by the Head, Transport for Victoria. When approved by the Head, Transport for Victoria, the plans must be endorsed by the Responsible Authority and will then form part of the permit. The plans must be drawn to scale with dimensions. The plans must be generally in accordance with the plans prepared by Jacan Design Group, dated June 2020, drawing No 015-114, but modified to show:

a) The removal of the southern vehicle crossing on the site's eastern boundary and reinstatement of the road reserve.

b) The existing northern crossover and driveway on the site's eastern boundary to be modified to the satisfaction of the Head, Transport for Victoria Authority.

(8) Prior to the commencement of the southern vehicle crossing on the site's eastern boundary must be removed, and the area reinstated to the satisfaction of and at no cost to the Head, Transport for Victoria.

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(9) Prior to the commencement of the use the existing northern crossover and driveway on the site's eastern boundary must be modified to the satisfaction of the Head, Transport for Victoria Authority and at no cost to the Head, Transport for Victoria. The crossover, driveway and associated works must be:

c) Formed to such levels and drained so that they can be used in accordance with the endorsed plans.

d) Treated with an all-weather seal or some other durable surface.

e) Driveways must be maintained in a fit and proper state so as not to compromise the ability of vehicles to enter and exit the site in a safe manner or compromise operational efficiency of the road or public safety (e.g. by spilling gravel onto the roadway).

EXPIRY OF PERMIT

(10) The above-mentioned planning permit expires if one of the following circumstances arise:

a) The development is not started within two (2) years of the date of this permit;

b) The development is not completed within four (4) years of the date of this permit;

c) The use does not start within four years of the date of issue of the permit; or

d) The use is discontinued for a period of two years.

The Responsible Authority may extend the periods referred to if a request is made in writing in accordance with Section 69 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

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14.7 REZONING OF FORMER MERBEIN SCHOOL SITES - 456 PASCHENDALE AVENUE, MERBEIN WEST & 13 JENNER STREET, MERBEIN

Summary

The purpose of this report is to recommend a suitable zone(s) for the former Merbein School sites, in response to the Department of Treasury and Finance's requested rezoning.

2021/0012

Moved: **Cr Jodi Reynolds**
Seconded: **Cr Glenn Milne**

That Council resolve to:

(i) object to the residential zoning currently sought by the Department of Treasury and Finance for sites 456 Paschendale Avenue Merbein West and 13 Jenner Street Merbein;

(ii) inform the Department of Treasury and Finance that for the purposes of the immediate rezoning request currently sought, the most orderly zone(s) is Rural Living Zone for 456 Paschendale Avenue Merbein West and both the Rural Living Zone and Farming Zone for 13 Jenner Street Merbein; and

(iii) provide the Department of Treasury and Finance with a written response detailing the above-mentioned resolutions.

CARRIED

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15 URGENT BUSINESS

Nil

16 COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

16.1 MEMBERSHIP & DELEGATE FEES, MILDURA FUTURE READY AND PASSENGER RAIL

File Number: 02/01/13

"How much has Council spent on membership, delegate fees and extras of Rail Freight Alliance and Central Murray Region Transport Forum? What is Council doing to progress Passenger Rail, one of the four pillars of Mildura Future Ready? Are the new Councillors aware that $500,000 was allocated to our Passenger Train in the Mildura Future Ready in 2017? Could I please request an update on the expenditure to date?"

Richard Sexton, Manager Corporate Administration advised that in relation to costs to Council for membership fees and delegate fees and extras of Rail Freight Alliance, the annual subscription for 2020 was $5,780. In relation to Central Murray Region Transport Forum, the annual subscription for 2020 was $4,400. Mr Sexton further advised that Council also has a $300 annual subscription to the North West Rail Alliance.

Mr Sexton further noted that due to the COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, there were no further expenses allocated in relation to delegate fees or extras.

Martin Hawson, General Manager Community advised that Council is currently progressing with its Transport Study, which is the main area of work commissioned from Mildura Future Ready. Councillors will be briefed on the Transport Study at a future Council Forum, with a view to complete the Study in mid-2021.

Sarah Philpott, Chief Executive Officer advised that further information will be provided directly to the question asker.

16.2 USE OF LOCAL RESOURCES

File Number: 02/01/13

"Why aren't you using all local people for the next stage of the riverfront?"

Chris Parham, General Manager Corporate advised that when Council undertakes a tendering process, there are a number of criteria and weightings against each criterion. When a tender is received, the subsequent assessment includes ensuring that the tender addresses each criterion, and the percentage weightings are then applied to each criterion, which can vary from tender to tender.

Mr Parham further advised that in the instance of the riverfront project, the tenders received varied in price, and the successful tenderer offered a mid-range price. Council applies best value principles to the criteria and weightings, and these are outlined in the tender documents which the tenderers must consider prior to submitting their tender.

Martin Hawson, General Manager Community advised that the construction of the project will also go out to tender and local contractors are welcomed and encouraged to apply. Mr Hawson further advised that with regard to stage 1 of the riverfront, 70 per cent of the work and the $20+ million budget was awarded to local contractors, using the process that Mr Parham has outlined.

17 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

6:49pm

2021/0013

Moved: **Cr Mark Eckel**
Seconded: **Cr Stefano De Pieri**

That Council resolve to move into confidential business to deal with the following matters as pursuant to section 66(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020*:

17.1 TENDER AWARD - IRYMPLE DRAINAGE UPGRADE - CONTRACT 1920/7

Section 3(1)(a) - Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released the information to be received, discussed or considered in relation to this Agenda item, may prejudice the commercial position of Council, as various negotiations remain pending.

17.2 TENDER AWARD - SAN MATEO AVENUE AND TENTH STREET MICROSURFACING - CONTRACT 1920/52

Section 3(1)(a) - Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released the information to be received, discussed or considered in relation to this Agenda item, may prejudice the commercial position of Council, as various negotiations remain pending.

17.3 TENDER AWARD - FIRE SERVICES UPGRADE AT THE ALFRED DEAKIN CENTRE - CONTRACT 1920/72

Section 3(1)(a) - Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released the information to be received, discussed or considered in relation to this Agenda item, may prejudice the commercial position of Council, as various negotiations remain pending.

17.4 INCREASE TO PROVISIONAL SUM IN CONTRACT 1819/60 - BOUNDARY INTERSECTION ROADWORKS

Section 3(1)(g) - Private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that –

(i) relates to trade secrets; or
(ii) if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage

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Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released the information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that: relates to trade secrets; or if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking unreasonably to disadvantage.

CARRIED

18 CLOSURE

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7:23pm.

Date of Confirmation: 24 February 2021

Signed: _____

Chairperson

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