

# Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum

## Minutes – Executive Meeting No. 12 – Wednesday 21 August 2019

### City of Moreland, Council Chambers, Coburg Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street COBURG

**Chairperson:** Cr Matthew Kirwan (*Greater Dandenong*) – Acting Chair

**Attendees:** Wambui Thirimu (*Brimbank*), Deputy Mayor Cr Susanne Newton (*Darebin*), Marek Krol (*Greater Dandenong*) – Minute Taker, Mayor Cr Jonathon Marsden (*Hobsons Bay*), Liz Shield (*Hume*), Mayor Cr Shane McCluskey (*Monash*), Pamela Kosij (*Monash*), Mayor, Cr Natalie Abboud (*Moreland*), Katrina Gabb (*Moreland*), Nalika Peiris (*Moreland*), Cristina Del Frate (*Yarra*)

**Guests:** Nick Butera (*Whittlesea*), Shankar Kasynathan (*Amnesty International*), Veronica Lopez (*Amnesty International*), Samuel Dariol (*Refugee Council of Australia*), Marie Hapke (*Refugee Advocacy Network*), Marcella Brassett (*ASRC*)

**Apologies:** Mayor Cr Roz Blades (*Greater Dandenong*), Peter Johnstone (*Greater Dandenong*), Mayor Cr Susan Rennie (*Darebin*), Cr Victoria Borg (*Brimbank*), Mandy Bathgate (*Darebin*), Amber Cassidy (*Hobsons Bay*)

Agenda Item	Discussion Points/Comments	Follow up Actions / Who
<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cr Matthew Kirwan welcomed all representatives to the meeting</li> <li>• Mayor, Cr Natalie Abboud welcomed everyone to Moreland City Council and acknowledged Traditional Owners.</li> <li>• Apologies noted.</li> </ul>	
<b>Endorsement of Minutes of Previous Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous minutes moved by Marek Krol, seconded by Mayor Cr Jonathon Marsden.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Review of Outstanding Action Items</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No outstanding items</li> </ul>	
<b>Purpose of today's meeting &amp; Strategy Development – activities and next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the previous Taskforce meeting BYN objectives were revised. Subsequently Cr Kirwan explained to members that it was now necessary an appropriate strategy going forward to achieve the revised objectives.</li> <li>• Over the last two months Mayor Cr Roz Blades, Cr Matthew Kirwan, Peter Johnstone and Marek Krol had met with the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) and Refugee Advocacy Network (RAN) to find out their planned advocacy approaches on the SRSS issue.</li> <li>• At the last meeting several Executive Taskforce Members had expressed interest in hearing from sector representatives directly so for this meeting representatives from RCOA, ASRC and RAN have been invited to give Executive members a direct insight into their planned advocacy approaches and opportunities for collaboration. This will enable the Taskforce to brainstorm its own advocacy approach that will complement not duplicate or unintentionally conflict with the sector approach and also obtain their sector insight. Options could then be discussed by Taskforce and final strategy options developed for the following meeting.</li> </ul>	

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<p><b>Special Presentation – Shankar Kasynathan (<i>Amnesty International</i>)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shankar thanked Taskforce members for supporting Amnesty International’s work in community sponsorship of refugees and introduced Veronica to provide Taskforce with a reflection on community sponsorship and her lived experience.</li> <li>• Amnesty International first began to look into community sponsorship as an alternative option to offshore processing. Canada was an ideal case study, having run the program now for four decades. ‘My New Neighbour’ campaign and Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative was launched to promote community sponsorship within Australia, and combat the regressive policy of offshore processing.</li> <li>• Focus has been for people with lived experiences to share with the community their stories, and promote community led solutions to refugee crisis.</li> <li>• Going forward, potential for different campaigns to co-exist in terms of shared objectives. The notion of neighbourhoods, supporting our neighbours, and acknowledging that the government has failed our neighbours are shared themes and narratives that run through numerous campaigns.</li> <li>• Library based community conversations, spearheaded by Moreland City Libraries, has provided opportunities for people to tell their stories of coming to Australia, as well as, hearing from those who stepped in and assisted refugees in their journey.</li> <li>• Shankar suggested that this duality of stories often reaches the unconverted, due to its diverse audience. Stories do not have to be limited to helping people to arrive safely to Australia, but also assisting people who are already here but are receiving no support. This would tie in with the BYN SRSS advocacy.</li> <li>• 34 councils already supportive of the campaign, but actively looking for more councils to work with. Opportunity for new councils to provide time and spaces for further community-based conversations.</li> <li>• Recently the ACT Legislative Assembly supported a call to urge the Federal Government to revise the exploitative policy barriers that inhibit community sponsorship from becoming a more accessible pathway.</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shankar asked the Taskforce if Mayors could rally around this cause and urge State Government, State Opposition, and Victorian Greens to call the Federal Government to relax policies around community sponsorship. This lobbying could be exercised in the form of Taskforce letters.</li> <li>• Shankar welcomed the Taskforce to propose an idea how they could work with Amnesty International to deliver community-based conversations, where the messages of community support and SRSS could be interlaced.</li> <li>• After Shankar's presentation, the Taskforce resolved to decide on the Taskforce support of the Amnesty campaign and the degree of support at their next Taskforce Executive Meeting</li> </ul>	

<p><b>General Update on the SRSS Situation</b> (Note: As agreed at the meeting this has been tabled due to lack of time during the meeting)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>State Government funding:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No official announcement as to which agencies will receive Victorian Government funding. Most likely it will be larger organisations, with a similar rollout and funding levels in both southeast and northwest areas.</li> <li>○ It is expected that there will be KPIs attached to the service agreement. This will enable organisations to capture larger amounts of data regarding referrals, requests etc. Essentially this will provide a more robust qualitative idea of the impact that SRSS cuts are having.</li> <li>○ October to March, Ministers will be submitting their proposals for next year's budget to the Cabinet's Expenditure Review Subcommittee which decides which initiatives will be funded. It is hoped by November our agencies will start having enough data to present a compelling case for further funding.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>SRSS Reviews:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ According to AMES, three-month reassessments have shown the number of SRSS approvals has increased. Flexibility from the Department has improved.</li> <li>○ All reviews should be finalised by November. Those review will include families with kids over 6.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Other trends:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There is an increase of women on partner visas who are applying for asylum due to family violence experienced in Australia. There is, however, provision in Australia's migration laws to allow you to continue with your permanent partner visa. This is a faster process than applying for protection visa which does not lead to permanency. Multicultural Unit of VicPol should be made aware of this.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Presentations discussing potential future advocacy steps</b></p> <p>a) <b>Marcella Brassett (ASRC)</b>  b) <b>Samuel Dariol (RCOA)</b>  c) <b>Marie Hapke (Refugee Advocacy Network)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marcella Brassett (ASRC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ASRC focus is on the entire system that refugees and people seeking asylum have faced over the last 8 years – bridging visa renewals, onshore detention, no work rights, not permitted to study, working in exploitative jobs etc. These are the consequences of not having a safety net.</li> <li>○ SRSS cuts would be connected to this entire story.</li> <li>○ This redeveloped strategy would have people seeking asylum as the spokespeople of the campaign for change, rather than advocates or organisations. ASRC is providing support to Justice for Refugees Group with media and planning strategies. Also supporting the group to talk about safety net and permanent protection so they can be reunited with their families, as well as, SRSS, work rights, secure work, study etc.</li> <li>○ Given the Government’s ideological leanings, essential to frame this issue as an economic one. Provide people seeking asylum with opportunities to contribute to the economy.</li> <li>○ Aim to not to criticise the government too much, rather encourage them to be better.</li> <li>○ Call to action – freedom birds. 1000 people have folded origami birds and posted them to Scott Morrison. It shows support for people seeking asylum. There are also unbranded graphics which include MPs holding up freedom birds.</li> <li>○ Mobilisation: predominantly online campaign, as well as, one-on-one community conversations.</li> <li>○ WhatsApp group created for unbranded videos and graphics which can be shared with people to post on social media using #freedombirds.</li> <li>○ Invoke hope amongst supporters in light of the election result.</li> <li>○ Taskforce could use variety of social media channels to promote ASRC cause and collaborate in content creation. Connect community members who are seeking asylum with ASRC to potentially create content.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Samuel Dariol (RCOA): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Minister Coleman’s office has clearly stated they will not be reinstating the SRSS. Open and more sympathetic towards other ‘practical solutions’ however.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overall focus is on creating a fair process for claiming asylum. Subsequently focus has shifted away from prioritising SRSS restatement or change, and towards other aspects of the system. These include creating a faster refugee status determination system and allowing people to receive permanent protection visas.</li> <li>○ Suggestion for other jurisdictions to make up the shortfall in Federal Government funding for people seeking asylum e.g. local government, state government. Whilst advocating for the Federal Government to develop a more efficient refugee processing system. Cr Matthew Kirwan noted that State Government may not be prepared to continue to provide humanitarian support and that local government did not generally see its role as providing welfare or material aid support. Individual Councils may be prepared to take on some of this burden but this would be an individual decision for individual Councils.</li> <li>○ Intel suggests that PM's Office will have much more oversight regarding refugee processing.</li> <li>○ Negotiations with government would be dependent on achieving milestones. Negotiations would be centred away from public sphere, with intention to negotiate behind closed doors. <u>If no solutions secured in next six-month timeframe, then strategy would be evaluated.</u></li> <li>• Marie Hapke (RAN): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus should remain on reinstating SRSS. Traction being made around Newstart increase, similar traction may be achieved with SRSS.</li> <li>○ Refugee Advocacy Network has been encouraging supporters to write to their local MPs.</li> <li>○ Potential for Taskforce to work with local grassroots organisations and neighbourhood houses in advocating for people seeking asylum.</li> <li>○ Suggestion for Taskforce to continue with Back Your Neighbour campaign, remain vocal.</li> <li>○ Opportunities for community awareness raising through libraries and other council services to provide stories of lived experience. Similar approach to Amnesty International's My New Neighbour campaign.</li> <li>○ Symbolic support provided by Council to refugees is important, and less costly than other ways of generating community support. Recommendation for Taskforce is to encourage other councils to show such support.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Potential raised for BYN to take on fundraising initiatives in line with its advocacy efforts.</li> <li>○ Refugee Advocacy Network supportive of continuing to promote BYN campaign and Taskforce advocacy.</li> </ul>	
<b>Strategy Development – discussion (Inc. Back Your Neighbour Evaluation Report and discussion of MAV and other stakeholder approach)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Due to running behind schedule Strategy Development was not discussed. Cr Kirwan suggested various advocacy options be presented at a teleconference meeting scheduled prior to September Taskforce Executive meeting to allow input before a final recommended options or options shortlist was provided to the September Executive meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organise teleconference with Taskforce Executive Members to discuss options – Marek (CGD)</li> </ul>
<b>Taskforce Administration, Governance and Membership Update</b> a) Frequency and future dates for Taskforce meetings – proposal to move bi-monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A moved forward to next meeting</li> </ul>	
<b>Regional/Local Updates</b> a) Northern Alliance b) PSAARD Taskforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A moved forward to next meeting</li> </ul>	
<b>Other Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A moved forward to next meeting</li> </ul>	
<b>Close</b>	<b>Wednesday 25 September 2019, 1:00pm-3:00pm</b> <b>Brimbank City Council</b> <b>Community and Civic Centre, 301 Hampshire Road, Sunshine</b>	

Other proposed meeting dates and venues

- Wednesday, 27 November                      Hume