

# Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum

## Minutes – Executive Meeting No. 20 – Thursday 12 May 2022

11am-1:30pm, 1230 Nepean Highway, Cheltenham, Oakleigh Room / Microsoft Teams

**Chairperson:** Mayor, Cr Steve Staikos (Kingston).

**Attendees:** Mayor, Cr Jasmine Nguyen (*Brimbank*), Pradeep Peteti (*Casey*), Cr Susanne Newton (*Darebin*), Cr Susan Rennie (*Darebin*), Shabaz Fattah (*Darebin*), Cr Rhonda Garad (*Greater Dandenong*), Peter Johnstone (*Greater Dandenong*), Marek Krol (*Greater Dandenong*), Celia Chang (*Hume*), Susan Quach (*Kingston*), Elisabetta Robecchi (*Kingston*), Emma Sampson (*Moreland*), Nelum Buddhadasa (*Moreland*), Tara Bewley (*Yarra*).

**Guests:** Mayor, Cr Samantha Byrne (*Moonee Valley*), Daniel Scoullar (*Social Change Projects*).

**Apologies:** Lynley Dumble (*Brimbank*), Wambui Thirimu (*Brimbank*), Renae Buckley (*Casey*), Calum Pattie (*Casey*), Courtney Boi (*Casey*), Mayor, Cr Lina Messina (*Darebin*), Cr Susan Rennie (*Darebin*), Cr Susanne Newton (*Darebin*), Mayor, Cr Jim Memeti (*Greater Dandenong*), Cr Lana Formoso (*Greater Dandenong*), Mayor, Cr Peter Hemphill (*Hobsons Bay*), Cr Jonathan Marsden (*Hobsons Bay*), Kristen Cherry (*Hume*), Julie Andrews (*Hume*), Mayor, Cr Stuart James (*Monash*), Cr Brian Little (*Monash*), Cr Josh Fergeus (*Monash*), Fee Harrison (*Monash*), Colin Bostock (*Monash*), Pamela Kosij (*Monash*), Mayor, Cr Mark Riley (*Moreland*), Petr Svoboda (*Moreland*), Nalika Peiris (*Moreland*), Meghan Hopper (*Moonee Valley*), Emma Patterson (*Moonee Valley*), Cr Gabrielle de Vietri (*Yarra*), Mayor, Cr Sophie Wade (*Yarra*) & Cristina Del Frate (*Yarra*).

Agenda Item	Discussion Points/Comments	Follow up Actions / Who
<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor, Cr Steve Staikos welcomed all representatives attending 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 Cr Rhonda Garad (CGD) and seconded Mayor, Cr Mark Riley (Moreland).</li> </ul>	
<b>Review of Outstanding Action Items</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No outstanding action items.</li> </ul>	

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Update – Mayoral Taskforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New Members</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Launceston Council</li> <li>○ Conversations about membership currently taking place with Liverpool Council, New Castle Council, and Blacktown Council.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Back Your Neighbour Working Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Yarra ready to publish an article within the next day about a person seeking asylum in their council magazine.</li> <li>○ Moreland planning to create a video, however experiencing delays due to Covid-19.</li> <li>○ Councils have found capturing stories quite challenging, including ethical considerations, tokenism, and respecting anonymity.</li> <li>○ Most, if not all, Councils have posted Back Your Neighbour material on their social channels.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<p><b>Report Back – Canberra Delegation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Meetings with Senators and MPs</b></li> <li>• Five Mayors and Councillors representing the Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum met with a range of MPs and Senators in Canberra.</li> <li>• Delegation included Mayor, CrJim Memeti, Cr Rhonda Garad, Mayor, Cr Steve Staikos, Mayor, Cr Mike Riley, and Cr Hadi Saab.</li> <li>• Meetings with ALP included Andrew Giles MP, Senator Kristina Keneally, Ged Kearney MP, Josh Burns MP, Libby Coker MP, Linda Burney’s MP Chief of Staff, and Peter Khalil MP.</li> <li>• Major ALP takeaways included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Temporary Protection Visas to be scrapped and replaced automatically with Permanent Protection Visas.</li> <li>○ ‘Fast Track’ system to be abolished.</li> <li>○ Many acknowledged the cultural issue with the Department of Home Affairs and that it needs to change.</li> <li>○ Maximum 90-day processing system for all asylum claims. Met with ASRC to understand the level of resourcing required.</li> <li>○ Not changing ‘stopping the boats’ policies nor offshore detention. However, offshore detention processing times will be maxed at 90-days. And, people seeking asylum will be provided with legal services, access to journalists, and detention centres will be once again managed by the Australian Public Service.</li> <li>○ The UNHCR will receive \$500 million to process more claims within Southeast Asia e.g., Thailand and Indonesia.</li> <li>○ None of these policies have been promised within the first 100-days of an ALP government.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meetings with Liberal Party included Russell Broadbent MP.</li> <li>• Major Liberal takeaways included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There will be no changes to asylum seeker policies before the election. However, we may see some changes after.</li> <li>○ Conservative members are now starting to want this issue resolved.</li> <li>○ Broadbent has been quietly advocating for years for positive incremental change.</li> <li>○ Agreed with the Back Your Neighbour asks, and suggested advocating to the National Council of Churches to put pressure on the Federal Government.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with Greens Party included Senator Nick McKim, and Senator Janet Rice. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Completely supportive of the Back Your Neighbour asks.</li> <li>○ Hoping for a hung parliament to ensure positive change.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Independent Zali Stegall MP expressed limited support for Back Your Neighbour campaign. Not an issue overly affecting her constituents.</li> <li>• Although Helen Haines MP and Andrew Wilkie MP did not meet with the group, they were supportive of Back Your Neighbour.</li> <li>• Tim Wilson MP also agreed to meet, but then cancelled.</li> <li>• Suggestion was made to write letters to all elected 'Teal Independents' – congratulating and requesting meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marek (CGD) prepare letters to all 'Teal Independents'.</li> </ul>
<b>Update and Next Steps – Back Your Neighbour Campaign</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Election 2022 Scorecard</b></li> <li>• Scorecard was presented to the Executive.</li> <li>• Some concerns were raised as to whether Councils will be able to promote the scorecard via their communication channels due to political sensitivity.</li> <li>• Suggestion was made that Councillors independently promote the scorecard via their own social channels and that a second scorecard be developed for Councils to promote.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daniel (SCP) create second scorecard without ticks and crosses.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan – First 100 Days</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deakin Post-election Refugee Information Session (1-3pm, Saturday 11 June)</b></li> <li>• The Deakin Law School and Deakin CREATE (Deakin Refugee, Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education) will host an information session at Greater Dandenong to inform refugees of the policy changes (if there is a change in Government) or implications if there is no change in government.</li> <li>• The Mayoral Taskforce agreed to officially support the event and attend.</li> <li>• <b>Refugee Week 2022 (June 14 – June 20, 2022) and Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) National General Assembly (June 19 – June 22)</b></li> <li>• Upcoming ALGA National General Assembly provides an opportunity for members of the Mayoral Taskforce to connect with one another, as well as, recruit new members.</li> <li>• Suggestion was made to book a meeting room at ALGA for members to meet with another.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marek - send invitations for Refugee Information Session to all Taskforce Members.</li> <li>• Marek – book room at ALGA National General Assembly.</li> </ul>

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<b>Rev Time Costello on refugees and people seeking asylum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increasing intake of Afghan refugees</b></li> <li>• Rev Tim Costello met with many members of the backbench to increase the Afghan intake e.g., Trent Zimmerman MP, Andrew Hastie MP, Katie Allen MP etc. Meetings were not seeing any progress.</li> <li>• In response, Tim created Christians United for Afghanistan campaign (uniting left and right Christian denominations) to place pressure on the Federal Government to increase intake numbers.</li> <li>• On budget night announcement was made for 16,500 additional places to be granted to Afghans.</li> <li>• <b>Advocating for people seeking asylum living in the community</b></li> <li>• Senator Kristina Keneally and Anthony Albanese MP assured Tim that TPVs would be scrapped under a Labor government. However, Labor remains evasive about specific details before the election.</li> <li>• Tim Costello – ‘TPVs are exaggerated cruelty’.</li> <li>• Scott Morrison’s own Pentecostal denomination have supported Tim’s advocacy around refugees.</li> <li>• Tim suggested connecting with the Pentecostal Church to support Back Your Neighbour.</li> <li>• Mayor, Cr Steve Staikos mentioned connecting with Echo Church (local church in Kingston), as they receive funding from Council to provide food relief to the community.</li> <li>• Suggestion was also made to connect with churches even if Labor were to win the election.</li> <li>• Tim suggested working towards a joint ask between local councils and churches. This could also involve a group trip to Canberra.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marek to follow up.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A.</li> </ul>	
<b>Next Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-3PM, Wednesday 8 June 2022</li> </ul>	
<b>Close</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:30pm</li> </ul>	