

Local Government Mayoral Taskforce - Supporting People Seeking Asylum Roundtable Workshop – Minutes
Monday 6 February 2023, 10:00am - 1:00pm, Richmond Town Hall, 333 Bridge Rd, Richmond VIC 3121.

Attendees:

Pradeep Peteti (Casey), Cr Gaetano Greco (Darebin), Shabaz Fattah (Darebin), Mayor Cr Eden Foster (CGD), Peter Johnstone (CGD), Ann Ly (CGD), Marek Krol (CGD), Cr Steve Staikos (Kingston), Mayor Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston), Amey Rountree (Monash), Mayor Cr Angelica Panopoulos (Merri-bek), Cr Mark Riley (Merri-bek), Nelum Buddhadasa (Merri-bek), Emma Sampson (Merri-bek), Tara Bewley (Yarra), Mayor Cr Claudia Nguyen (Yarra), Mayor Cr Joseph Haweii (Hume), Celia Chang (Hume), Ben Pollard (Hobsons Bay), Cr Dr Olivia Ball (Melbourne), Kara Barnett (Melbourne), Cr Rose Iser (Moonee Valley), Geoff Paine (Nillumbik), Sandra Khazam (Port Phillip), Cr Jennie Barrera (Wyndham), Dalal Sleiman (Whittlesea), Hedeeyeh Saberian (Mornington Peninsula).

Apologies:

Mayor Cr Bruce Lancashire (Brimbank), Cr Jasmine Nguyen (Brimbank), Wambui Thirimu (Brimbank), Lynley Dumble (Brimbank), Courtney Boi (Casey), Teresa Lawler (Casey), Sadia Ali (Casey), Calum Pattie (Casey), Mayor Cr Julie Williams (Darebin), Cr Susanne Newton (Darebin), Cr Lana Formoso (CGD), Cr Rhonda Garad (CGD), Susan Quach (Kingston), Cr Brian Little (Monash), Colin Bostock (Monash), Cristina Del Frate (Yarra), Julie Andrews (Hume), Mayor Cr Des Hudson (Ballarat), Frances Salenga (Ballarat), Nikki Williams (Bendigo), Mayor Cr Andrea Metcalf (Bendigo), Lisa King (Banyule), Cr Peter Castaldo (Banyule), Mayor Cr Tammy Radford (Cardinia), Mayor Cr Sarah Carter (Maribyrnong), Catherine Dwyer (Maribyrnong), Lord Mayor Sally Capp (Melbourne), Deputy Lord Mayor Nicolas Reece (Melbourne), Councillor Roshena Campbell (Melbourne), Cr Jason Chang (Melbourne), Cr Elizabeth Mary Doidge (Melbourne), Cr Davydd Griffiths (Melbourne), Cr Jamal Hakim (Melbourne), Cr Philip Le Liu (Melbourne), Cr Rohan Leppert (Melbourne), Cr Kevin Louey (Melbourne), Jane Wager (Geelong), Dom Diocera (Geelong), Mayor Cr Mark Lane (Whitehorse), Debbie Seddon (Whitehorse), Mayor Cr Heather Cunsolo (Port Phillip), April Wilson (Nillumbik), Mayor Cr Ben Ramcharan (Nillumbik), Chris Munro (Mornington Peninsula), Sally Abbott (Moonee Valley), Celia Rice (Moonee Valley), Meghan Hopper (Moonee Valley), Mayor Cr Susan McIntyre (Wyndham), Liana Thompson (Wyndham), Emily Harris (Bass Coast), Cr Jennifer Anderson (Macedon Ranges), Mayor Cr Annette Death (Macedon Ranges), Mayor Cr Rob Steane (Maroondah), Chris Riseley (Maroondah), Mayor Cr Isabelle Tolhurst (Queenscliffe), Mayor Cr Ian Bye (Wellington), Mayor Cr Tony Briffa (Hobsons Bay) and Cr Jonathon Marsden (Hobsons Bay).

Guests: Rebecca Eckard (Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA]), Ogy Simic (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre [ASRC]), Saajeda Samaa (ASRC) and Sajjad Askary.

Facilitator: Raymond Burnett (Consulting by Design)

Agenda Item	Minutes	Action
1. Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome by Mayor Cr Claudia Nguyen (Yarra) • Background to the Mayoral Taskforce and introduction to the Workshop by Mayor Cr Eden Foster (CGD). 	
2. Review of Taskforce Priorities	<p>Why was the Mayoral Taskforce formed? For whom did you wish to create what difference? What was your shared intention and resolve? (Open room discussion)</p> <p>Key points raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mayoral Taskforce was formed due to SRSS cuts by former Government • Costs shift to Local Government to address impact on local community • Desire for simpler, fairer and equitable system to allow people seeking asylum to build a new life • A humane response - basic rights for people seeking asylum • A platform for Local Government to exert greater influence and advocacy as a collective • Need for a voice on behalf of the people seeking asylum community • Desire to change language and re-frame perspective to be more inclusive • In response to the burden on local service providers and disadvantage and suffering heard from 'on the ground' • Increase funding for local support services • Engagement with refugees and people seeking asylum (hearing from those with lived experience) 	
3. Sector Updates	<p>Current policy landscape - Rebecca Eckard (RCOA) - presentation attached.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions for people in offshore processing. Resettlement options currently available: up to 200 in USA, 450 in New Zealand and 159 sponsorship applications to Canada. ALP plans to continue with this policy but must find solutions for 500-600 people. • Temporary Protection: up to 3-year TPV or up to 5-year SHEV, since 2017, people are still waiting for initial decision. 31,000 people waiting on a pathway to permanency – waiting on announcement for 9 months since Federal election. Pathway will be offered to rejected applications but unclear what this looks like. • In 2021-22, 94% reduction in Services Australia 'asylum seeker payments' from 2015-16. Now under 900 people receiving this payment. • ALP National Platform includes commitments to: Means-tested access to legal advice and appropriate social services, streamlining processing of asylum claims. <p>Sector implications - Ogy Simic (ASRC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change has been extremely slow, and the systemic changes has not occurred since Labor's election 	

	<p>to government.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great resourcing burden on service agencies e.g., ASRC spends \$30,000 on rice alone. • ASRC Key priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fairness. Government to deliver on commitment on providing permanent protection. Advocacy continues - 1000 calls to PM's office, rallies in Canberra, etc. 2. Evacuating people from Papua New Guinea and Nauru. 3. Safety. Access to work and study rights. 4. Supporting refugee-led campaigns and giving refugees a greater voice. <p>Community experience - Sajjad Askary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime arrivals – processing of applications in a timely manner a key advocacy ask. • Reunification with family – children of people seeking asylum >23 years old from eg. Pakistan, Iran, are not eligible for the reunification pathway. • Timeline on permanency pathway urgently needed. • High financial costs for people seeking asylum- fees are paid to a migration agent for the Community Support Program, followed by an additional cost from sponsor organisations who charge another amount for processing. 	
<p>4. Back Your Neighbour (BYN) Campaign Evaluation</p>	<p>What worked well? What was achieved? What was the impact of the campaign? (Open room discussion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor committed to actions before the election. • While noting that commitments are yet to be delivered and an announcement has been delayed for months, the BYN Campaign delivered a consistent and shared narrative on behalf of Local Government eg. Sharing a unified voice in meetings with key MPs, louder voice to be heard and Councils not working alone. • The increased awareness of the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum associated with the BYN led to financial investment in local services for some Councils. • The voice of lived experience was included in Ministerial meetings. • Access to and engagement with key Ministers. • Campaign asks aligned with other advocacy in the sector. • Councils were able to utilise the Campaign to demonstrate advocacy and work progressing in this space. <p>Identified Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from other States and nationally more Council representation needed. • How do we add value from a Local Government perspective? • Are there other opportunities for Local and State Government to make direct change? • Changing community perceptions - the need for a stronger community-led voice in the campaign. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal staff turnover and engagement of Councillors/new Mayors has been challenging for some Councils. • Strategic engagement of local MPs for some Councils a challenge. Need to identify MPs – who to talk to? Active engagement, targeting local MPs by Mayors within their respective electorates that could have been done but was not. • Implementation gaps eg. better use of other media channels. • Strong use of messaging from community and lived experience in the Campaign. 	
5. Taskforce Future Role	<p>What can the Taskforce collectively do better than others? What are the strengths of the Taskforce?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy to the decision makers • Storytelling, honouring lived experience from the local level • Representing the Local Government tier to deliver a key message to the Federal Government. • Access to links and networks to MPs and key sector stakeholders <p>What will the taskforce collectively do in 2023?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding Labor accountable to commitments – closing the loop. Maintaining momentum rather than starting a new campaign. • Connecting with Coalition? Or identify gaps and engage more Labor MPs? “What is the best use of available resources to target and maximise impact?” • Partnering with peak bodies like RCOA to compliment messaging. • Target peak bodies e.g., ALGA to raise profile and grow Taskforce membership. • Expanding membership of the Taskforce by leveraging on connections. Potentially ‘Welcoming Cities’ to build on Taskforce membership. • Growing the Taskforce internally and recruitment of more Councillors to attend Taskforce meetings – the messaging could be based on legal implications and economic costs. “Free up a blocked system”– frame it as a financial benefit to get more Councillors on board. • Cost shifting to State/Federal Government to highlight key issues. • Celebrate the achievements of Labor. • Support ‘friendly’ MPs to put pressure on key decision makers • Amplify and promote stories of lived experience, tell local success stories – find families, give them a bigger platform that encourages wider support and action. Similar to Biloela example. • Incorporate voice of lived experience and service providers right at the beginning. • Seize the moment before the next election – need a prompt timeline for Taskforce activities. • Tone and style for campaign is important - some Council members are concerned that if messaging is too bold risks backfire with State Government who provide funding to Councils. • All agreed to keep the Campaigns’ five advocacy asks. 	

6. Governance and Resourcing	<p>What membership arrangements are required?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing requirements for Councils to join. • Still need Executive to lead and undertake grunt work. • Low fee contribution/membership fee for General members. • Consideration of individual Councillor membership as a fourth membership tier with no membership fee. <p>What resourcing arrangements are required?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Taskforce Administrator role through Greater Dandenong Council is 0.5 EFT. Additional staff resourcing would be required to grow the Taskforce membership nationally and to increase advocacy activities in line with what has been suggested in section 5 Taskforce Future Role. Consideration to a Gold, Silver, Bronze Council membership categories with sliding level of contribution and responsibility. This could also accommodate 4th tier individual councillor membership – no fee. Secretariat will bring back contribution options to resource an additional 0.5 EFT resource for consideration at the next Executive meeting. <p>Governance and Resourcing will be a key point of discussion/decision at the next Executive meeting.</p>	
7. Next Meeting	Wednesday 15 March 2023, 1pm-3pm.	CGD to confirm meeting date and send out invite.
8. Close	Meeting closed at 1.05pm.	