

## 7.10 DRAFT COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

Director Community Development Arden Joseph

Aged and Community Support

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### Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses for public exhibition the draft COVID-19 Recovery Plan (Attachment 1).
2. Notes the COVID-19 Recovery Plan will be available for public exhibition for 21 days, 16 May 2021 to 5 June 2021.

<b>REPORT</b>
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### Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Moreland community very deeply, in direct and indirect ways, with a disproportionate effect on many vulnerable groups which has magnified existing inequalities. Council undertook a Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA) as part of its responsibility to coordinate relief and recovery efforts after an emergency and to assist in understanding the full impact of COVID-19 on the community.

While this global emergency has required significant response from all Australian jurisdictions, the Moreland community is relying on Council to continue to respond to the needs of our community and local businesses, for services, resources and support as the focus moves to recovery and roll out of the vaccination program.

The longer-term impacts on health and the broader social and economic impacts are not yet known. Factors such as the removal of federal government income subsidies and changes to state government eviction bans from late March 2021 will impact on many Moreland residents.

Key issues emerging through research and consultation have informed the proposed recovery priorities:

- Financial distress: impacts for households;
- Mental health and wellbeing: the mental health toll on the Moreland community;
- Digital access and inclusion: impact of technological barriers;
- Social inequalities and vulnerabilities: isolation, discrimination and family violence which has damaged social cohesion within the community; and
- Economic impacts: impacts on local businesses and the economy.

While there are positive signs of economic recovery at a national level, the extent of local economic recovery is not yet known. The COVID-19 Recovery Plan (**Attachment 1**) contains many strategies to support community recovery that can be implemented by individual Council business units using existing resources. Council will continue to engage with the business community to ensure our economic development policy and program settings are well positioned and responsive to continue to support business and economic recovery, which will in turn assist broader community recovery.

## **Previous Council Decisions**

### **Disability Advocacy COVID-19 impacts - 9 December 2020.**

*That Council:*

1. *Notes the progress of the Disability Advocacy and COVID-19 Impacts Implementation Plan 2020.*
2. *Under the Advocacy Item titled 'Equitable access to places, information and opportunities', add an extra item 'Engage with the federal government and Australia Post to make Post Offices accessible for people in wheelchairs.'*
3. *Receives a further progress report of the Implementation Plan via the Human Rights Advisory Group meeting minutes in June 2021 or the minutes of whichever Human Rights Advisory Group meeting is closest to this date.*

### **COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Grants Update - 9 September 2020**

*That Council:*

1. *Allocates an additional \$300,000 towards the 2020/21 business recovery grants program.*
2. *Allocates an additional \$50,000 to the 2020/21 arts recovery grants program.*
3. *Funds the increased allocations through identified savings in staff costs.*
4. *Notes a further report will be received on the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on Council's financial position.*

### **COVID-19 Impacts on Leisure and Aquatics Contract Sum - 12 August 2020**

*That Council, due to COVID-19 impacts on operations and contract costs, approves the increase of \$1.5 million in the cost of Contract 1866 - Active Moreland Aquatic and Leisure Services Management, bringing the total cost of the contract for the three-year period concluding in June 2021 to \$6.5 million.*

### **COVID-19 New lockdown restrictions - 8 July 2020**

*That Council:*

1. *Acknowledges and thanks the people of Fawkner, Brunswick West, Glenroy, Hadfield and Oak Park for their participation in the COVID-19 testing blitz.*
2. *Continues to provide facilities and support to enable the State Government testing and community engagement blitz.*
3. *Calls on the State Government to provide additional financial support to businesses in restricted postcodes and those in surrounding areas*
4. *Notes the support provided to the community, arts sector and businesses through the Moreland Council Recovery and Rebuild Package endorsed as part of the 2020-21 Budget, and through Council support services and emergency relief.*
5. *Notes the lockdown of nine public housing towers in Flemington and North Melbourne and the grave concerns and fears raised by residents in other high rise towers such as the one in Barkly Street, Brunswick about any similar hard lockdown occurring in other estates.*
6. *The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer communicate with the State Government with the following proposals*
  - a) *If any residents of the public housing tower in Brunswick test positive to COVID-19, that they be offered transfer to an approved quarantine accommodation rather than the whole tower being closed down;*
  - b) *Sanitiser be immediately made available in every laundry, foyer and lift and on every floor.*

- c) *That increased levels of deep cleaning of shared facilities (laundry, lift, rubbish chutes and stairwells) in line with sanitising to prevent the spread of the virus;*
  - d) *Current onsite security be instructed to assist with proper social distancing measures in foyers and lifts;*
  - e) *In the event of a lockdown, there be an immediate rent freeze for tenants;*
  - f) *Council assist the Department of Housing with attempting to implement emergency free Wi-Fi for the tower block. This is vital in the event of a lockdown;*
  - g) *Accessible messages through all community languages among residents in the Brunswick tower plus age appropriate information for children.*
  - h. *Make face masks available to all residents*
7. *In the event the State Government seeks Council support for any of the above, authorises the Chief Executive Officer to provide such support.*

### **Closures and Modifications in Response to COVID-19 Emergency - 25 March 2020**

Council adopted the COVID-19 Financial Hardship Policy and special grants program. It included a range of community relief and recovery measures to assist community, business and the arts. Relevant to business, this included waiving food registration renewal fees for the 2020 calendar year and refunds on all fees paid in advance for services that can no longer take place, including street trader permits and community venue hire.

### **Proposed 2020-21 Budget - 8 July 2020**

Council adopted the 2020-21 Budget and allocated \$300,000 to the COVID-19 Community and Business Development Grants for local businesses in the most financial stress from the second lockdown. This included at least \$50,000 to go towards making business shops more disability accessible to the community.

## **1. Policy Context**

The State government declared a State of Emergency in Victoria on 16 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, staged restrictions in response to the emergence and control of COVID-19 outbreaks has occurred with major social and economic impacts on Moreland's community and economy.

The State government's initial State of Emergency declaration was extended to 11.59pm 9 April 2021.

## **2. Background**

In response to the State Government's declaration of a State of Emergency on 16 March 2020, a whole-of-Council response and relief effort was implemented, to protect and support the local economy, community and staff.

All local government areas are required to have Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMP) – a requirement of the *Emergency Management Act (1987 and 2013)*. Moreland's Municipal Emergency Management Plan, developed by the multi-agency Moreland Municipal Emergency Management Committee (MEMPC), sets out arrangements for preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies at the local level.

Council's approach in responding to the impacts Covid-19 to date, has been multifaceted, including:

- Performing emergency management roles and responsibilities
- Provision of logistical and other support for Covid-19 testing in priority suburbs;
- Moreland Covid-19 Coordination Group (Vic Police & DHHS);

- Incident Management & coordination of an internal relief and recovery team;
- Implementation of: Working for Victoria Program, Community Connector Moreland relief program, Community Activation and Social Isolation Initiative (CASI); Incident Management and Community Engagement; as well as
- adapting many services and programs to meet the changing needs of the community;
- Allocation of \$6,242,000 funding to complement and address (where appropriate) gaps in Federal and State support packages including: Council rates and fee relief for cases of hardship and grants to community organisations and businesses;
- Collaboration with local partner organisations to deliver projects and initiatives to support residents through a range of initiatives;
- Advocate for local government area issues to state government where appropriate, including regular meetings with DHHS, eg: international students

The impacts of COVID-19 have touched almost every resident, household and business in Moreland. The multiple actions of Council and our partner organisations has supported Moreland businesses and community towards in adapting to the required changes and building resilience. The proposed actions outlined in the Recovery Plan will further support community and economic recovery throughout 2021 and into 2022.

### **3. Issues**

#### **Community Impact and Community Strengths**

While many impacts from the pandemic are visible, there are far reaching social and economic impacts for the community. The impacts have had a disproportionate effect on many vulnerable groups and have magnified existing inequalities. Young people, women and people from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds and international students were particularly impacted by the collapse of the jobs market. Some impacted community members were ineligible for Federal or State Government support payments leaving them with no income at all.

Social isolation and chronic uncertainty exacerbated the psychological distress and mental health problems among previously healthy people. This was observed especially among those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Children and young people have experienced detrimental impacts due to disruption to education and inability to socialise, amidst overall stress for families.

People with insecure housing or employment have faced significant impacts and people with disability and their carers have experienced additional and unforeseen costs, with some facing extreme financial hardship. Local agencies have assisted these communities by providing food and other emergency relief measures. The ongoing provision of emergency relief will continue to be important as many households are expected to face ongoing financial difficulties.

Along with community need, the pandemic has highlighted the many strengths of the Moreland community and service sector including:

- A strong and dynamic community service network, with effective working relationships with Council and an openness to collaborate and share resources, knowledge and skills; and
- A culture of caring with offers of volunteering, donations, community led initiatives and an increased sense of community for many in Moreland.

## **Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA)**

To better understand the impacts on the community and in line with emergency management requirements, Council undertook a population weighted telephone survey of 316 residents and 8 “in depth” interviews to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the Moreland community. The survey was undertaken by external consultants and occurred mid-September 2020, during level 4 COVID-19 restrictions. The findings of the SIA survey (**Attachment 2**) have informed the development of the Recovery Plan.

### **Economic Impacts**

In April 2020, Council surveyed local businesses to assess the impact Covid-19 restrictions were having at that point on industry and employment. 95 per cent of local businesses reported that they suffered adverse impacts, caused by revenue loss, customer loss and forced closures. Other adverse impacts included increased costs, reduced staff and supply chain disruptions. The Boost for Business Covid-19 Program was developed in response, with a broad range of projects to address the key issues reported within that survey. Total funding of \$550,000 was allocated over two grant rounds.

### **Considerations for Council in supporting community recovery**

While the State and Federal governments have been heavily involved in the emergency response to the pandemic, local government plays a key role in supporting recovery. Local recovery efforts will require coordination to ensure a community-led and effective process. As highlighted in the State Relief Plan, relief and recovery will need to continue to occur simultaneously over an extended period. It is therefore proposed that the Recovery Plan have an 18-month timeframe, with the possibility of updating and extending it beyond that date if required.

It is important that relief and community support enhances connections with existing social and health networks to improve the self-reliance capabilities within communities, with a focus on building community resilience. Recovery planning needs to account for groups of people with increased needs due to COVID-19. Moreland’s secondary impact analysis indicates a need to focus on young people, CALD groups and those with existing vulnerabilities such as isolated older residents and those with insecure housing.

A key principle in emergency recovery is having a community led process which will strengthen community resilience. To that end Council will continue to engage with community networks and other stakeholder groups and will facilitate communication and collaboration to support community and economic recovery.

A number of strategies and plans are currently being developed in alignment with the Council four-year term, these include the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Children, Young People and Families Plan, both of which will have an enhanced focus on supporting the community in recovery efforts due to COVID-19. Similarly, the planned actions within the Living and Ageing Well Framework have been modified, as have a number of service responses as the needs of older people have changed due to the pandemic.

While there are positive signs of economic recovery at a national and state level, these improvements are unevenly spread and the extent of local economic recovery is not yet known. Council will continue to engage with the business community to ensure our economic development policy and program settings are well positioned and responsive to continue to support business and economic recovery.

### **Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

It has been noted that COVID-19 recovery presents an opportunity to target programs to low income households to improve their energy efficiency.

## **Economic sustainability implications**

The COVID-19 Recovery Plan will address the decline in local economic activity in the context of the overall goal of the *Economic Development Strategy*: to facilitate the growth and diversity of local jobs, while using our resources wisely.

## **Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The COVID-19 Recovery Plan is aligned with the priorities of the Moreland Human Rights Policy and has a focus on addressing inequalities.

Early on when the pandemic started Council became aware through its community partners about the hardship and/or isolation experienced by vulnerable groups in the community, including people with a disability, migrant communities, older people, young people and women. In response, Council strengthened connections with a wide range of local service providers and community groups that assisted in alleviating hardship and isolation through a number of support programs and also provided additional support to service networks to address community needs. The feedback from these connections has complemented the evidence collated by Council to inform the Recovery Plan under the key issue of building community resilience and strengthening social cohesion.

## **Gender Impact Assessment**

A gender impact assessment of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan has been undertaken to assess the implications of the planned actions on people of all genders. The Secondary Impact Analysis identified a range of groups most impacted by the pandemic and the Recovery Plan aims to target programs and service modifications to those who are experiencing ongoing impacts. These groups include women, people with a disability, older isolated residents, international students and some people from CALD backgrounds, including asylum seekers and refugees. Councils Gender Equity Community Reference Group were consulted and briefed on the key findings of the Secondary Impact Assessment, the implications of this for people of all genders in relation to the development of the Recovery Plan.

## **4. Community consultation and engagement**

COVID-19 restrictions have impacted Council's ability to undertake engagement through usual approaches, however significant research and consultation with key stakeholders and a cross section of the community has informed the development of the Recovery Plan.

The Secondary Impact Analysis in particular was informed directly by a population weighted telephone survey of local residents and a business survey was undertaken in the early stages of the pandemic to assess the impacts on local businesses and the Moreland economy.

A cross Council steering group with links to Council Advisory Groups, local organisations and other stakeholders has been consulted in the development of the Recovery Plan.

Councils Gender Equity Community Reference Group were consulted in the development of the Recovery Plan.

More recently the community has been invited to comment on Councils approach to COVID-19 recovery through the Conversations Moreland Web page as part of the Imagine Moreland project to develop a long-term vision for the City. These views will be considered along with wider community and stakeholder consultation on the draft Recovery Plan.

## **Communications**

Council has engaged with and communicated extensively with the Moreland community and relevant stakeholder groups and organisations throughout the pandemic. Social media has been an important avenue for the dissemination of up to date information, as well as an increase in printed communication with a focus on essential health messaging. Accessible and inclusive tailored communication campaigns have also been undertaken for our CALD and hard to reach communities.

The Be Kind Moreland campaign has achieved extensive reach into the Moreland community, contributing to the increased sense of community and acts of volunteering and mutual support identified in the Secondary Impact Analysis.

## **5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## **6. Financial and Resources Implications**

Councils 2020- 2021 financial year budget included a \$6.24 million COVID-19 recovery and rebuild package as well as allowing for additional COVID-19 related costs.

Many strategies to support community recovery can be implemented by individual Council Business Units within existing resources. In some cases, this requires modification of or extension of existing programs and services and the COVID related support is funded through core service budgets.

Groups and issues which may require some form of additional resourcing include: the arts community, older isolated people with low IT proficiency/connectivity and young people experiencing mental health issues.

## **7. Implementation**

Council Business Units have been identified to lead each of the recovery actions. In some cases these actions relate to other key strategies and plans, particularly the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. A temporary part time COVID-19 Recovery Coordinator role has been established to support implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Recovery Plan over the next 12 months.

A key requirement is for Council to continue communication and engagement functions: with the community, businesses, other levels of government, partner agencies and community groups, all of whom have a role to play in ensuring Council remains agile and responsive throughout 2021 and into 2022.

It is proposed that input to Councils Imagine Moreland project in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic recovery be considered in the development of the final Plan and that the draft Recovery Plan be uploaded to the Conversations Moreland web page to seek community and stakeholder feedback.

## **Attachment/s**

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|--------------------------|--|------------|
| <a href="#"><u>1</u></a> | Moreland-COVID-19-recovery plan DRAFT                                    | D21/71107  |
| <a href="#"><u>2</u></a> | Moreland City Council - COVID-19 Secondary Impact Analysis - Full Report | D21/118474 |