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| **Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum****Minutes– Meeting No. 32 – Wednesday 21 February 2024**1pm-3pm via Microsoft Teams |
| **Chairperson:** Mayor Cr Jenna Davey-Burns (Kingston) **Attendees:**Cr Jo Armstrong (Ararat), Amy Bennett (Bass Coast), Lisa King (Banyule), Wambui Thirimu (Brimbank), Mayor Cr Jack Kowarzik (Cardinia), Mayor Cr Lana Formoso (Greater Dandenong (CGD)), Peter Johnstone (CGD), Ann Ly (CGD), Thiviya Nagenthiram (CGD), Mayor Cr Susanne Newton (Darebin), Shabaz Fattah (Darebin), Ben Pollard (Hobsons Bay), Mayor Cr Naim Kurt (Hume), Celia Chang (Hume), Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston), Tracey Collins (Kingston), Michelle Devanny (Kingston), Cr Janet Pearce (Macedon Ranges), Mayor Cr Cuc Lam (Maribyrnong), Goutham Gurreddy (Maroondah), Chris Riseley (Maroondah), Kara Barnett (Melbourne), Mayor Cr Adam Pulford (Merri-bek), Emma Sampson (Merri-bek), Nelum Buddhadasa (Merri-bek), Amey Rountree (Monash), Cr Rose Iser (Moonee Valley), Lisa Davis (Newcastle), Melanie Hill (Newcastle), Mayor Cr Liz Pattison (Surf Coast), Mayor Cr Denise Massoud (Whitehorse), Mayor Cr Jennie Barrera (Wyndham), Mayor Cr Anab Mohamud (Yarra);NSW: Anni Gallagher (Orange), Michael Maxwell (Blacktown), Cr David Mallard (Orange), SA: Adriana Christopoulos (West Torrens), TAS: Alison Hines (Hobart).**Guests:** Rebecca Langton (Refugee Council of Australia), Kieran Magee (Big Walk 4 Refugees)**Apologies:**Mayor Cr Simon Brooks (Mornington Peninsula), Mayor Cr Sarah McMahon (Hawkesbury), Cr Elizabeth Adamczyk (Newcastle), Mayor Cr Pierce Tyson (Moonee Valley), Zoe Quinn (Whitehorse), Lord Mayor Sally Capp (Melbourne), Mayor Cr Bob Sanders (Ararat), Josephine Frawley (Ararat), Mayor Cr Des Hudson (Ballarat), John Drennan (Ballarat), Frances Salenga (Ballarat), Mayor Cr Tom Melican (Banyule), Cr Peter Castaldo (Banyule), Mayor Cr Clare Le Serve (Bass Coast), Mayor Cr Andrea Metcalf (Bendigo), Nikki Williams (Bendigo), Pinar Maher (Bendigo), Mayor Cr Ranka Rasic (Brimbank), Lynley Dumble (Brimbank), Pradeep Peteti (Casey), Teresa Lawler (Casey), Cr Gaetano Greco (Darebin), Cr Belinda Moloney (Geelong), Jane Wager (Geelong), Mayor Cr Matt Tyler (Hobsons Bay), Julie Andrews (Hume), Meg Lawton (Hume), Susan Quach (Kingston), Jennifer Anderson (Macedon Ranges), Mayor Cr Annette Death (Macedon Ranges), Catherine Dwyer (Maribyrnong), Mayor Cr Kylie Spears (Maroondah), Paul MacDonald (Maroondah), Deputy Lord Mayor Nicolas Reece (Melbourne), Cr Elizabeth Mary Doidge (Melbourne), Cr Rohan Leppert (Melbourne), Cr Roshena Campbell (Melbourne), Cr Kevin Louey (Melbourne), Cr Philip Le Liu (Melbourne), Cr Jamal Hakim (Melbourne), Cr Dr Olivia Ball (Melbourne), Cr Jason Chang (Melbourne), Cr Davydd Griffiths (Melbourne), Cr Angelica Panopoulos (Merri-bek), Petr Svoboda (Merri-bek), Mayor Cr Nicky Luo (Monash), Sally Abbott (Moonee Valley), Chris Munro (Mornington Peninsula), Simone Soeters (Newcastle), Mayor Cr Ben Ramcharan (Nillumbik), Deputy Mayor Cr Geoff Paine (Nillumbik), April Wilson (Nillumbik), Mayor Cr Heather Cunsolo (Port Phillip), Ewa Zysk (Port Phillip), Mayor Cr Isabelle Tolhurst (Queenscliffe), Mayor Cr Ian Bye (Wellington),), Sana Saiyed (Whittlesea), Dalal Sleiman (Whittlesea), Cr Sahana Ramesh (Wyndham), Liana Thompson (Wyndham),), Amani Nyikang (Yarra), Cristina Del Frate (Yarra), Milica Latu (Yarra); NSW: Mayor Cr Kylie King (Albury), Mayor Cr Tony Bleasdale (Blacktown), Mayor Cr Bilal El-Hayek (Canterbury Bankstown), Graeme Beattie (Canterbury Bankstown), Garry Starr (Canterbury Bankstown), Danielle Wheeler (Hawkesbury), Mary Lyons-Buckett (Hawkesbury), Mayor Cr Darcy Byrne (Inner West), Cr Pauline Lockie (Inner West), Cr Justine Langford (Inner West), Cr Marghanita Da Cruz (Inner West), Mayor Cr Jason Hamling (Orange), Catherine Davis (Orange), Mayor Cr Philipa Veitch (Randwick), Cr Kym Chapple (Randwick), Cr Rafaela Pandolfini (Randwick), Mayor Cr Dallas Tout (Wagga Wagga); SA: Mayor Cr Michael Coxon (West Torrens); TAS: Lord Mayor Cr Anna Reynolds (Hobart). |

| **Item** | **Action** |
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| 1. **Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country**

Chair welcomed attendees and acknowledged Country. | - |
| 1. **Endorsement of Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Previous minutes endorsed. | - |
| 1. **Review of Outstanding Action Items**
* Refugee Council of Australia & Tanck Proposal for Advocacy Support Update.
* Member recruitment update:
	+ Brisbane Online information session was held on Tuesday 5 March, 11.30am – 12.30pm VIC time. Mayor Cr Cuc Lam and Cr Hadi Saab offered to speak at the session.
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| 1. **Back Your Neighbour (BYN) Monthly Engagement Plan 2023-24**
* December-February
	+ Mayors and Councillors BYN pledge for social media
	+ Write to local MP about Taskforce’s updated asks
	+ Invite Councillor friends who are not members to join
	+ Request Council M&C to share BYN video
* March
	+ Social media content - promotion of Member Councils’ initiatives/events supporting people seeking asylum
	+ Call out to Sign the Petition and engage MPs about advocacy asks during Harmony Week (20-26 March); extend invite to meet
 | Ann Ly & Peter Johnstone (CGD)All |
| 1. **Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) 2024 National General Assembly (NGA), Canberra, 2-4 July.**
* ALGA Taskforce Morning Tea Event and Delegation
* Acceptance of Motions closes on 29 March 2024.
* The 2024 theme is Building Community Trust and I see only 2 of the 12-priority categories as possible fits for the Taskforce’s asks. These being 6. Jobs and Skills and 7. Community Services. The criteria below govern the scope of the NOM so it will be a matter of trying to shoe-horn our interest area into a format that fits the ALGA criteria – while still being impactful enough to actually suggest something tangible to make a difference.
* Breakout room discussion
	+ navigating education system, upskilling of teaching staff understanding refugee needs and challenges; Include refugee youth focus (future workforce) - issues reported by our refugees / services english language within high schools
	+ scholarships and access ot higher education - The gap when young people finish high school but then not able to access University even if a sponsorship has been successful.
	+ Frustration about action – long waiting periods; raising awareness and promoting positive stories
	+ Multicultural framework review –
	+ Delays with visas
	+ Study to work rights – transition
	+ re jobs and skill - important to include strategies to combat systemic discrimination and racism in employment, inclusive recruitment and employment processes, unconscious bias, meaningful employment opportunities. e.g. discrimination b/c of someone's name, country of birth, length of time in Aust.
	+ Consider expanding work experience options within councils (providing insurance and such) as for example from TAFE ESOL classes, it is is not possible for TAFE to enable this, as not a part of the core of TAFE ESOL. program.
	+ Account to temporary visas policy changes – slow to happen
	+ We talked about making it easier for people to use their qualifications in Aus, and to fund health services provided by NGOs to asylum seekers
	+ mplementation of policy (faster processing) getting people off TPVs as have committed, education and employment - access to higher education/scholarships matching to meet skills shortages, Broader advocacy opportunities - increase refugee intake and responsibility for situation in PNG; Agree with @Susanne it was challenging for Ukrainian community and also people who were able to evacuate out of Palestine to transfer visa once here.
	+ important to address that visible inequity in the NOM. Refugees and asylum seekers should be treated fairly and equally regardless of their country of origin. These divisions often times define how refugees and asylum seekers are received in the community.
 | Peter Johnstone (CGD) |
| 1. **Refugee Council of Australia Advocacy Update**
* Rebecca Langton (Refugee Council of Australia) provided an overview of Refugee Council of Australia’s five priority areas:
	1. financial safety for people seeking asylum (via expanding SRSS eligibility or granting access to Special Benefit)
	2. ending temporary protection (including resolving situation for those refused protection under Fast Track)
	3. expanding the Humanitarian Program (plus additional places for complementary pathways)
	4. alternatives to closed immigration detention
	5. ending offshore processing (including solutions for those 'transitory persons' transferred to Australia)
* The Refugee Council are holding the Federal government to the [ALP Policy Platform](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.refugeecouncil.org.au/labor-government-changes-refugee-policies/__;!!OQUPkg!Rl2EhIOc7lkoxKh0B1NPlzasTiIrsMJjiMKZp7KQ9ADdcHTvahzTzCVaNk9C0c-6x0QtuHNqfdi1TAq1bCJ-WMqoQJ_0WdHJjbeM$) and its[recent pledges](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.refugeecouncil.org.au/australian-government-pledges-at-the-2023-global-refugee-forum/__;!!OQUPkg!Rl2EhIOc7lkoxKh0B1NPlzasTiIrsMJjiMKZp7KQ9ADdcHTvahzTzCVaNk9C0c-6x0QtuHNqfdi1TAq1bCJ-WMqoQJ_0WWEszU4i$) at the Global Refugee Forum, many of which impact the above policy areas.
* State Governments have withdrawn funding, for example NSW, for people seeking asylum support services. There is a cohort of 13,000 people seeking asylum who are particularly vulnerable and need a basic safety net
* Response to overseas crises – Ukraine, Sudan and Palestinians from Gaza – no consistency from Federal Government is causing community distrust and perceptions of unfairness. The Refugee Council are currently working on a model for a crisis response framework, to prevent issues arising from the current piecemeal approach by the Australian government, where people fleeing different conflict zones have been allowed to enter the country quickly on tourist visas, but then given inadequate and different levels of support (ie. Ukrainian, vs. Sudanese and Afghans and Palestinian arrivals).
* The Refugee Council have recently made a 2024-25 [pre-budget submission](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-25-Pre-Budget-Submission-1.pdf__;!!OQUPkg!Rl2EhIOc7lkoxKh0B1NPlzasTiIrsMJjiMKZp7KQ9ADdcHTvahzTzCVaNk9C0c-6x0QtuHNqfdi1TAq1bCJ-WMqoQJ_0WX2ICGjx$), which details recommendations regarding financial safety net and expanding Refugee & Humanitarian Program (including delinking onshore and offshore components).
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| 1. **Other Business**
	* Big Walk 4 Refugees is happening from 13 February – 26 March 2024. It is a virtual walk around Australia to show support for the 10,000 refugees who are still waiting for permanent visas because the unfair ‘fast track’ process has denied them the chance of a thorough assessment of their claims for refugee protection. Kieran Magee (Big Walk 4 Refugees) provided information about registering for the walk and signature walks happening in capital cities. Visit www.bigwalk4refugees.au for more information.
	* Palm Sunday Walks
		+ Melbourne – 10.30am Sunday 24 March 2024, Parliament Gardens. Flyer to be shared by event organisers. The Taskforce has endorsed this event and will be attending as per past years. Further details will be shared with Members closer to the date for attendance.
		+ Sydney - 2pm Sunday 24 March, Belmore Park. Details of the event and flyer was presented to attending Members. Event endorsement was sought from our Members; however, there was insufficient support to provide an endorsement on this occasion.
			- One of the challenges raised was the other topic area/s paired with the overarching refugee theme i.e. Climate change, AUKUS, Palestinian situation – some Member Councils have various and divided viewpoints on these matters within their own constituencies, hence not possible to provide endorsement.
			- Some Members indicated support for the event and representative/s will be attending.
 | Members are encouraged to register and participate in local Big Walk 4 Refugee events – All members.Details of Melbourne Palm Sunday walk to be shared with Members when available – Secretariat (CGD). |
| 1. **Next Meeting**
* Next Meeting Wednesday 20 March 2024, 1pm-3pm MS Teams, Chair: Mayor Cr Adam Pulford (Merri-bek).
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| 1. **Meeting closed 3pm**
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