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| **Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum****Minutes – Meeting No. 41 – Wednesday 26 February 2025**1pm-2.19pm online via Microsoft Teams |
| **Chair:** Cr Nicky Luo (City of Monash)**Attendees**: **VIC:** John Drennan (Ballarat), Raewyn Afu (Brimbank), Cr Virginia Tachos (Brimbank), Cr Kim Ross (Casey), Mayor Cr Jack Kowarzik (Cardinia), Peter Johnstone (CGD), Thiviya Nagenthiram (CGD), Cr Emily Dimitriadis (Darebin), Shabaz Fattah (Darebin), Yusuke Akai (Darebin), Celia Chang (Hume), Suzanne Bray (Kingston), Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston), Mayor Cr Pradeep Tiwari (Maribyrnong), Nelum Buddhadasa (Merri-bek), Mayor Cr Helen Davidson (Merri-bek), Emma Sampson (Merri-bek), Tracey Egan (Monash)Dalal Sleiman (Whittlesea), Cr Jennie Barrera (Wyndham), Amani Godwin (Yarra). **NSW**: Mayor Cr Kevin Mack (Albury), Cr David Mallard (Orange), **SA:** Mayor Cr Claire Boan (Port Adelaide Enfield); **Guests:** Rebecca Langton (Refugee Council of Australia), Lisa Button, Blaise Itabelo, Lilly Alexander (Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia).**Apologies:** **VIC**:Mayor Cr Jo Armstrong (Ararat), Cr Bob Sanders (Ararat), Mayor Cr Tracey Hargreaves (Ballarat), Cr Des Hudson (Ballarat), Suzannah Burton (Ballarat), Mayor Cr Elizabeth Nealy (Banyule), Lisa King (Banyule), Mayor Cr Andrea Metcalf (Bendigo), Pinar Maher (Bendigo), Nikki Williams (Bendigo), Mayor Cr Thuy Dang (Brimbank), Elyse Rider (Brimbank), Lynley Dumble (Brimbank), Mayor Cr Stefan Koomen (Casey), Ann Ly (CGD), Mayor Cr Kristine Olaris OAM (Darebin) Amelia Basset (Darebin), Michele Burton (Darebin), Mayor Cr Stretch Kontelj OAM (Geelong), Cr Trent Sullivan (Geelong), Sally Beck (Geelong), Mayor Cr Daria Kellander (Hobsons Bay), Ben Pollard (Hobsons Bay), Cathy Miles (Hobson Bay), Mayor Cr Jarrod Bell (Hume), Narda Shanley (Hume), Mayor Cr Georgina Oxley (Kingston), Charlie McFadden (Kingston), Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston), Jess Smith (Kingston), Mayor Cr Dominic Bonanno (Macedon Ranges), Jennifer Anderson (Macedon Ranges), Catherine Dwyer (Maribyrnong), Brooke Hobson (Maribyrnong), Kelsey Laffy (Maribyrnong), Mayor Cr Kylie Spears (Maroondah), Paul MacDonald (Maroondah), Chris Riseley (Maroondah), Lord Mayor Cr Nicholas Reece (Melbourne), Kara Barnett (Melbourne), Mayor Cr Paul Klisaris (Monash), Kate Wijeyesinghe (Monash), Deputy Mayor Cr Brian Little (Monash), Mayor Cr Ava Adams (Moonee Valley), Jason Triolo (Moonee Valley), Chris Munro (Mornington Peninsula), Mayor Cr Louise Crawford (Port Phillip), Cr Heather Cunsolo (Port Phillip), Ewa Zysk (Port Phillip), Mayor Cr Di Rule (Queenscliffe Borough), Mayor Cr Mike Bodsworth (Surf Coast), Cr Liz Pattison (Surf Coast), Mayor Cr Scott Rossetti (Wellington), Mayor Cr Andrew Davenport (Whitehorse), Zoe Quinn (Whitehorse), Mayor Cr Aidan McLindon (Whittlesea), Deputy Mayor Cr Daniela Zinni (Whittlesea), Mayor Cr Aidan McLindon (Whittlesea), Uzma Akhlaq (Whittlesea), Mayor Cr Mia Shaw (Wyndham), Kelisha Nikitas (Wyndham), Jenna House (Wyndham), Cr Jennie Barrera (Wyndham), Mayor Cr Stephen Jolly (Yarra), Cr Kenneth Gomez (Yarra), Cristina Del Frate (Yarra), Deputy Mayor Cr Sarah McKenzie (Yarra).**SA:** Tracy Hart (Port Adelaide Enfield), Alicja Clisby (Port Adelaide Enfield), **NSW:** Deputy Mayor Cr Jessica Kellahan (Albury), Cr Kylie King (Albury), Frank Zaknich (Albury), Mayor Cr Brad Bunting (Blacktown), Michael Maxwell (Blacktown), Claire Simmonds (Blacktown), Kerry Robinson (Blacktown), Mayor Cr Mark Greenhill OAM (Blue Mountains), Cr Brent Hoare (Blue Mountains), Tracy Burgess (Blue Mountains), Deputy Mayor Cr Romola Hollywood (Blue Mountains), Mayor Cr Bilal El-Hayek (Canterbury Bankstown), Garry Starr (Canterbury Bankstown), Graeme Beattie (Canterbury Bankstown), Mayor Cr Darcy Byrne (Inner West), Cr Liz Atkins (Inner West), Sue Pym (Inner West), Mayor Cr Ross Kerridge (Newcastle), Cr Elizabeth Adamczyk (Newcastle), Melanie Hill (Newcastle), Petria Jukes (Newcastle), Mayor Cr Tony Mileto (Orange), Anni Gallagher (Orange), Catherine Davis (Orange), Cr Philipa Veitch (Randwick), Mayor Cr Dylan Parker (Randwick), Mayor Cr Dallas Tout (Wagga Wagga), Deputy Mayor Cr Georgie Davies (Wagga Wagga), Cassandra Webster (Wagga Wagga); **TAS:** Lord Mayor Cr Anna Reynolds (Hobart), Alison Hines (Hobart); Mayor Matthew Garwood (Launceston). |

| **Item** | **Action** |
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| 1. **Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country**
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| 1. **Endorsement of Minutes of Previous Meeting**
* Previous minutes moved by Cr Jennie Barrera (Wyndham) and seconded by Cr Pradeep Tiwari (Mayberong).
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| 1. **Outstanding Action Items**
* Back Your Neighbour (BYN) campaign background information distributed. Secretariat available for 1:1 meeting with member Councillors/officers.

Campaign Asks as outlined in the Taskforce’s Terms of Reference:1. Provide people with a valid visa with work, travel and study rights.
2. Expand [the support program](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/status-resolution-service/status-resolution-support-services)eligibility criteria and simplify the application so that people in need can access health care, accommodation support and other essential services.
3. Ensure an independent, timely and fair humanitarian application and review.
4. Provide people refused protection under the ‘Fast Track’ system a fair review.
5. Continue to clear the backlog of asylum applications and appeals.
6. Abolish temporary visas and replace them with permanent protection pathways to citizenship for all humanitarian arrivals.
* BYN February e-newsletter was sent to 265 recipients (members and supporter organisations) – anyone can subscribe via the BYN website.
* The website’s ‘Email your MP’ page is live and members are encouraged to utilize and promote.
* Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly Motion – Member Endorsements due 10 March.
* Update on community endorsements:
* National Justice Project will write to Sydney City Council, encouraging them to join the Taskforce.
* The Healesville Refugee Advocacy Group (RAR) is doing the same with Yarra Ranges Council.
* On 28 February, Merri-bek Council officers presented on BYN at the Australian Churches of Refugee Taskforce Annual Get Together in Brunswick.
* In April, CGD officers will attend an Interfaith Network meeting in Dandenong. The network is already spreading the word online and at events.
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| 1. **Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia: Empowering Communities to Welcome Refugees**

Lisa Button, CEO & Blaise Itabelo, National Manager - Community Partnerships & Engagement (Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia)* Community Sponsorship Program Overview: Pairs groups of five or more community members with refugee newcomers for 12 months.
* Provides training and support, with volunteers welcoming refugees at the airport and assisting with integration.
* Refugees arrive as permanent residents but need local support to settle successfully.

Program Achievements:* Since mid-2022, 160 refugee households have been matched with community groups across Australia.
* Participants from 19 different countries have been supported in metro and regional areas.
* Community groups raise an average of $15,000 per sponsorship and provide significant voluntary support.
* 100% secured long-term housing within six months, most within 12 weeks.
* Nearly 70% found employment within a year.
* 95% engaged in English classes or were proficient, and over half pursued vocational training.
* 96% built social connections with their support group and broader community.

Ways to Get Involved:* Form a group of five or more to welcome refugees.
* Assist in promoting CRISP through newsletters, social media, or events.
* Support local groups by providing meeting spaces or fundraising opportunities.
* Offer local information and resources to help new arrivals navigate their communities.

Discussion: * Question about training or processes to ensure cultural safety for newly arrived refugees, given their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Noting a fundraising event in Northern suburbs on Saturday, with over 200 tickets sold. Lisa Button explained that cultural safety is a core principle in their training, which focuses on soft skills and is developed by individuals with lived experience and experts. The approach emphasizes awareness of cultural identity without reinforcing stereotypes, encouraging curiosity about individuals' unique experiences.
* Attendee congratulated the team on securing permanent funding and asked about UNHCR Resettlement, Promotion & Expansion to 202 Visa Holders. Lisa Button noted the program currently doesn’t support those unable to register with UNHCR but is advocating for expanded community sponsorship options.
* Blaise Itabelo highlighted outreach challenges, relying on word-of-mouth and events.
* Lisa Button noted advocacy efforts to extend the program to the Global Special Humanitarian Visa (subclass 202) to allow communities to sponsor and support their relatives.
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| 1. **Back Your Neighbour (BYN) Campaign: January – June 2025**
	* Federal Election Candidates and Key Seats – engagement and meeting invitations on working spreadsheet.
	* Member Recruitment – follow up and new invitations
 | All invitations sent by members are to be forwarded to Secretariat for tracking. |
| 1. **Name change - Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum**
	* Discussion paper presented and members asked to vote on one of the following options:
	1. Local Government Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum Votes (2 Votes)
	2. Local Government Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum (4 Votes)
	3. Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum (13 Votes)
	4. Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum (0 Votes)

Discussion:* Cr. Hadi Saab acknowledged the gravitas of the mayoral title but suggested that changing the name could reflect the Taskforce's evolution.
* Mayor Cr. Helen Davidson stressed the importance of the word "mayor" in the taskforce name.
* The name "**Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum**" received 13 votes and was endorsed.
 | BYN collateral will be updated to reflect new name – Secretariat. |
| 1. **Palm Sunday Walk 2025 Endorsement**
	* Sunday 13 April 2025 - Queen Victoria Gardens, Melbourne and Belmore Park, Sydney.
	* Taskforce members expressed support for endorsing both rallies, sharing their logo and $100 donation, with no opposition noted.
 | Secretariat will liaise with event organisers re endorsement. |
| 1. **Next Meeting**
* Wednesday 26 March 1pm-3pm; online. Chair: Mayor Cr Helen Davidson
* Wednesday 30 April 1pm-3pm, In person. Location Melbourne Town Hall. Chair: Mayor Cr Jim Memeti
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| 1. **Meeting closed 2.19pm**
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