

**Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum  
Minutes – Meeting No. 49 – Wednesday 4 March 2026**  
1pm-3pm, Microsoft Teams

**Meeting Chair:** Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston)

**Attendees: VIC:** Cr Bob Sanders (Ararat), John Drennan (Ballarat), Cr Victoria Borg (Brimbank) proxy for Mayor Cr Tachos, Raewyn Afu (Brimbank), Cr Samatha-Jane Potter (Cardinia), Sadia Ali (Casey), Shabaz Fattah (Darebin), Peter Johnstone (Greater Dandenong), Cr Rayane Hawli (Hobson Bay), Kate Jeffery (Hobson Bay), Celia Chang (Hume), Julie Andrews (Hume), Suzanne Bray (Kingston), Cr Janet Pearce (Macedon Ranges), Kara Barnett (Melbourne), Dep Mayor Cr Dr Jay Iwasaki (Merri-bek) proxy for Mayor Cr Abboud, Nelum Buddhadasa (Merri-bek), Emma Sampson (Merri-bek), Dalal Sleiman (Whittlesea), Jenna House (Wyndham), Amani Godwin (Yarra),

**NSW:** Linda Guiance (Blacktown), Mayor Cr Merri Southwood (Lane Cove), Dep Mayor Cr Rochelle Flood (Lane Cove), Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk (Newcastle), Cr David Mallard (Orange) Cr Tina Kordrostami (Ryde)

**Guests:** Rebecca Langton (Refugee Council of Australia), Aimee Dare & Nadia Camu (Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre)

Item	Lead
<b>1. Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country</b>	Chair
<b>2. Endorsement of Minutes of Previous Meeting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 December 2025 (Executive Meeting – City of Melbourne), and</li> <li>• 10 December 2025 (Interstate Members Online Meeting) were endorsed without amendment.</li> </ul>	Chair

Item	Lead
<p><b>3. Palm Sunday 29 March 2026</b> Explanation of logistics for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melbourne event: Community event for justice, respect and kindness, calling for communities in which everyone can feel safe and respected, and refugees are welcomed. This event is in the long tradition of calling for peace and social justice on Palm Sunday. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1.00pm: Gather on Princes Bridge under the Back Your Neighbour yellow banner</li> <li>○ 1.30pm: Walk along Southbank to the Red Stairs</li> <li>○ 2.00pm: Speakers at Red Stairs Amphitheatre on Southbank</li> <li>○ See <a href="#">Palm Sunday 2026 - 29th March - Stronger Together - Refugee Advocacy Network</a> for further information about event details and resources for schools.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sydney event: Sunday March 29 2pm at Belmore Park, near Central Station. The march will proceed to Victoria Park.</li> </ul> <p>Taskforce member councils are encouraged to have representatives participate and amplify via their respective social media channels. Lord Mayor of Melbourne is expected to attend.</p>	<p>Secretariat (Peter Johnstone)</p>
<p><b>4. Supporting People Seeking Asylum in Merri-bek</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of Merri-bek’s Social Cohesion Plan (2020–26) and long-term partnership with the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre.</li> <li>• Advisory Group of people with lived experience established in 2023; improves trauma-informed decision-making.</li> <li>• Recent achievements include Refugee Week events, community celebrations, and leadership development.</li> <li>• Key barriers identified: childcare costs, school expenses, lack of driving lessons access, need for sport and employment participation, racism and family violence support gaps.</li> <li>• Merri-bek to share evaluation outcomes once complete.</li> </ul>	<p>Nelum Buddhadasa (Merri-bek), Aimee Dare and Nadia Camus from Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre</p>
<p><b>5. Refugee Week 2026 - Celebrating a million refugee stories</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme: A Million Stories, recognising Australia’s one-millionth refugee arrival since 1947.</li> <li>• Councils encouraged to host events, amplify storytelling, become poster pick-up points, or consider sponsorship.</li> <li>• Webinar on 11 March for councils and partners.</li> <li>• Updated slides with resource links to be circulated – in separate email.</li> </ul>	<p>Rebecca Langton (Refugee Council of Australia)</p>

Item	Lead
<p><b>6. Back Your Neighbour 2026</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALGA delegation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ in person meeting invitation to Federal MPs at electorate office OR Canberra 24-25 June during parliamentary sitting week. Secretariat has previously circulated talking points on BYN priorities.</li> <li>○ Lived Experience Expression of Interest form presented for members' feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Two lived-experience delegates to be selected via Expression of Interest (EOI).</li> <li>○ Councils asked to identify and support potential applicants.</li> <li>○ Travel and accommodation arranged by the Taskforce; stipends reimbursed after meetings.</li> <li>○ Discussion emphasised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ value of officer accompaniment for wellbeing and policy support</li> <li>▪ need for translation or childcare support to be offered</li> <li>▪ sensitivity regarding applicants with unresolved visa status</li> <li>▪ opportunity to draw candidates from recent ministerial intervention cohorts</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Other updates since last meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Whatsapp Group for Taskforce members- encourage Councillor rep and key contact officer to join this group <a href="https://chat.whatsapp.com/B81Zthl5M9sG6Xng8Tt6R">https://chat.whatsapp.com/B81Zthl5M9sG6Xng8Tt6R</a>.</li> <li>○ Taskforce (City of Melbourne Lord Mayor) sent letter to Minister Burke in the lead up to Christmas about permanency for transitory group.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Secretariat (Peter Johnstone)</p>
<p><b>7. Other Business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councils encouraged to meet with local federal MPs using Taskforce briefing notes.</li> <li>• Positive reflections shared on the Taskforce's advocacy impact, despite national and global challenges.</li> </ul>	<p>Chair &amp; All</p>
<p><b>8. Next Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thursday 7 May 2026 1pm-3pm online. Chair Mayor Cr Sophie Tan</li> </ul>	<p>Chair</p>
<p><b>9. Meeting close 3.25pm</b></p>	<p>Chair</p>